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Indian History: India - Earliest times to the 8th century AD

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UNIT 1 INDIA: PHYSICAL FEATURES

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to explain :

- Why in the study of the history of a country an understanding of its physical features is necessary,
- how we look at the physical features as students of history,
- the relationship between environment, geography and history, and
- the uneven pattern of historical growth in the Indian sub-continent.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

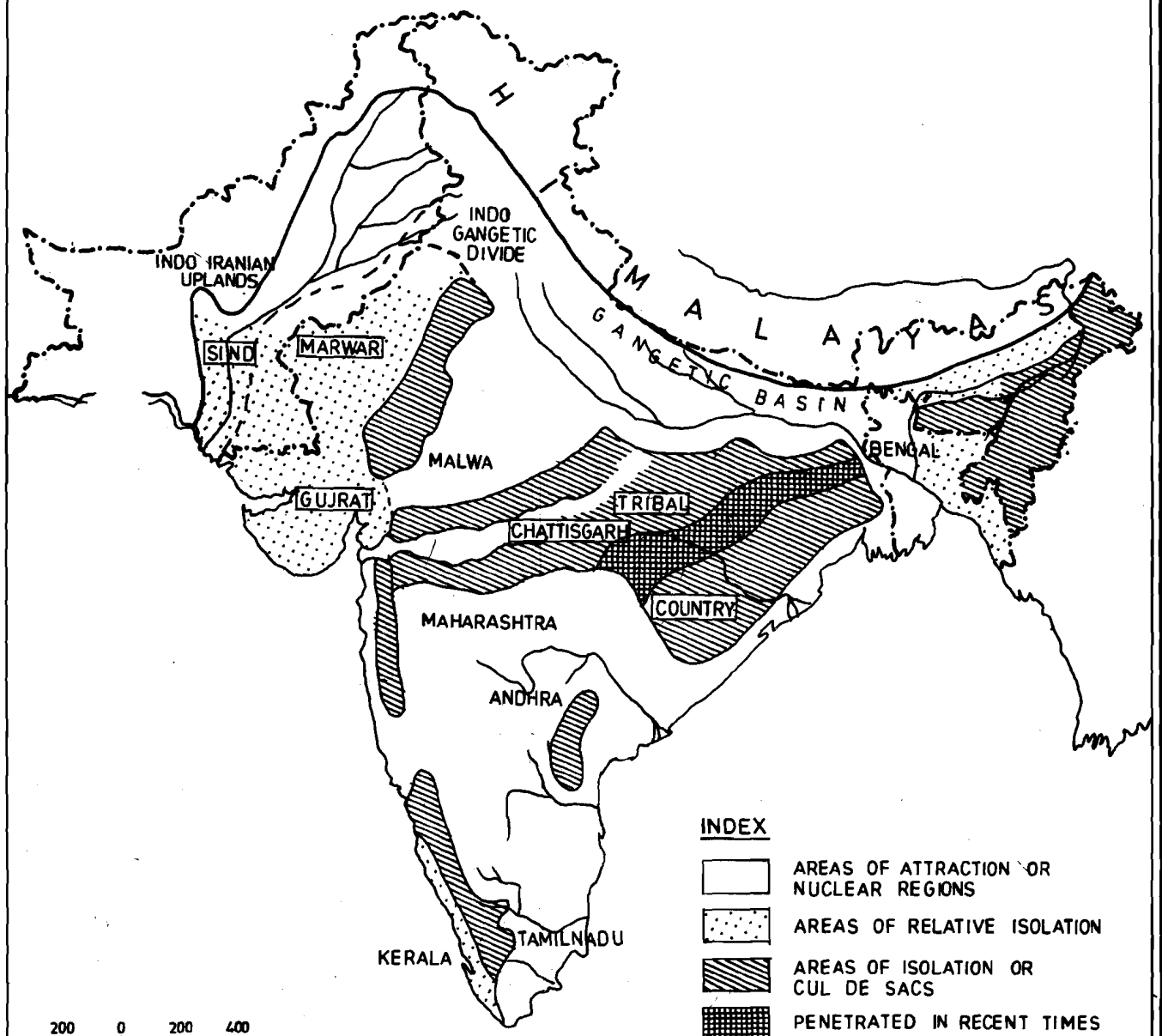
History without geography is largely incomplete and devoid of its vital substance for it loses focus in the absence of the concept of space. That is why history is regarded both as the history of mankind and the history of environment. It is difficult to separate the two. The history of humans and the history of environment mutually influence one another. Soil, rainfall, vegetation, climate and environment exercise considerable influence on the evolution of human cultures. In fact, the essence of human progress is the increasing emancipation of human beings from the clutches of nature or control of the vagaries of nature. In this regard technological progress helps human beings in conquering their environment. However, not until a very late stage in history were human beings able to control their environment effectively. Naturally, thus as we move back in time it becomes necessary to appreciate and understand the geography, environment and physical regions that had a bearing on Indian history.

In this Unit, we shall try to acquaint you with the physical features of the Indian sub-continent, which have had an important bearing on historical developments.

1.2 PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

Variations of soils, topography, rainfall and climate have created a number of distinctly different regions, with their separate characteristics and identities. Physical regions often

PHYSICAL REGIONS OF INDIA



Map 1. Physical Regions of India.

correspond to culture zones or regions i.e., they tend to differ from one another at the level of language, food, dress, crop pattern, population density, caste structure, etc. For example, in some areas like Uttar Pradesh and northern Bihar—the fertile plains of the Ganga Valley—population concentration is very high, while the mountainous tribal central India is sparsely populated. Similarly, certain areas like Magadha, Kosala, Avanti, Maharashtra, Andhra, Kalinga and the Chola country emerged earlier as developed pockets while others lagged behind. Historically, the emergence of regions has therefore been uneven, and different regions have been characterised by differential characteristics, which are largely related to and influenced by geography and environment. To give another example, we find that wheat is the staple food of people in Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, while rice is the principal crop and main component in the diet of people in eastern India viz. Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Why is this so? This is so because :

- different crops have different natural habitat zones,
- they tend to grow in specific natural environments., and
- in course of time they influence the dietary habits of people there.

Similarly, forms of irrigation differ from region to region :

- rivers and canals have been the most important form of irrigation in northern India,
- ponds have been very useful in eastern India, and
- tank irrigation has played a significant role in South Indian agriculture.

These variations do not mean that rivers are not important in eastern and southern regions. But what they reflect is that people take recourse to different methods to augment additional water sources in different regions, depending on what method is most suitable for a particular region.

Geography and environment play a major role in the pattern of dresses also. For example, we can compare and contrast the dress styles of the people of Kashmir, Rajasthan and those living along the coasts. This again reflects the climatic and environmental effects.

While the riverine plains and deltas have given birth to and sustained advanced cultures through the ages, the mountainous intermediate zone of central India has retained heavy concentration of tribal population in various pockets. Thus, while the riverine plains are liberally endowed by nature and have lives of their own the isolated regions remained unaffected by advances made in other regions. The co-existence of different forms of dress, food-habits and cultures in the sub-continent, therefore, can be largely explained with reference to physical geography.

Regional differences and related separate regional identities, greatly fostered by geography, have stood in the way of the rise of durable, pan-Indian states in Indian history. Never was the whole sub-continent a single political unit. This holds true for the Mauryan empire, the Delhi sultanate, the Moghul empire as well as British India. At the same time, it needs to be emphasised that though these differences between regions, which are geographically structured, have prevented the rise of pan-Indian states in our history, yet at no period have they created separate nationalities.

1.2.1. Environment and Human Settlements

The relationship between physical geography, human settlements and settlement patterns is yet another important theme which deserves attention. For example, the Sind region today is relatively warm and dry because rainfall in the region is very low. However, we know that the Harappan Civilization flourished over large parts of the same region in the past. Some scholars opine that the region in the past had wetter climate with possibly higher rainfall and this enabled the civilization to give itself a high standard of living. It has also been argued by some scholars that over utilisation of the natural resources, leading to depletion of the natural vegetation cover, together with the onset of a drier climate led to the collapse of the civilization by adversely affecting its subsistence basis. (for a detailed discussion on this see Block-2, Unit-9).

The inhospitable topography together with a possible population pressure on land and resources, forced people to migrate out of the core area of the civilization. The civilization, thus, faded out.

On the other hand, one is struck by the success of the Magadhan Empire and by the kind of

political ascendancy it achieved. How do we account for it? It can be argued that it was a product of the convergence of a number of factors :

- highly fertile soils,
- sufficient rainfall ensuring a rich annual paddy crop;
- proximity to iron ore mines and sources of stone and timber of Chotanagpur Plateau which is towards the south of Magadha;
- the rivers provided for comfortable communication and trade;
- the closeness and continuity of settlements, facilitated in no small way by these natural advantages, indicating great population density.

A combination of these factors helped the comfortable conquest of the northern Gangetic plain. In fact, it was due to these reasons that the Indo-Gangetic plains as a region was way ahead of others in terms of agricultural productivity or population base. The territorial expansion over the northern plains then provided the basis for the exercise of unquestionable Indian supremacy. All this fits into a neat sequence—one deriving itself from the other. The supremacy achieved by Magadha was based on the conquest of the northern plains which was blessed by the favourable convergence of necessary variables such as soil, rainfall, vegetation, easy communication lines and availability of natural resources.

With the political ascendancy of Magadha, its capital Pataliputra became the capital of northern India or the imperial capital and it continued to remain important for many centuries. Geographical reasons have been put forward to explain both the rise and fall of Pataliputra. While in its early history the surrounding rivers like the Ganga, Son and Gandak provided for natural defence and easy trade and transport, by the middle of the first millennium A.D. they had become positive liabilities owing to perennial floods. It is known that the Gupta and post-Gupta period was characterised by the decline of trade and the decay of towns. With the decline of north Indian trade and commerce, in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, the curtailed human movements and the shifting away of the course of the river Ganga, the usefulness of the rivers was reduced. One may add that to explain the decay of towns in Gangetic northern India in the same period geographical explanations such as the deforestation of the hinterland and consequent reduction of rainfall have also been suggested. These explanations may not always be correct but the examples definitely suggest that the interrelationship between historical processes and geographical features and/or factors was always close.

1.2.2 Arguing Against Geographical Determinism

At this point it is important to remember that it is one thing to see or appreciate the interrelationship between physical features and the unfolding of historical processes in a region but it is an entirely different matter to perceive history in terms of geographical determinism. Recognition of geographical factors helps in a better understanding of cultural developments. This also largely explains the different patterns of growth and development in divergent regions. However, a geography and environment cannot be taken as some kind of prime-movers, for after all natural regions are only areas of possibilities and these possibilities are actualised through human intervention at the stage of their technological attainments. It has been argued that "Nature determines the route of development, while man determines the rate and the state." Thus, neither is the influence of nature fixed nor is the man and environment relationship static. The limits set by nature are conquered by human experience and by human being, with their tools. This is an ongoing process which continuously enriches the realm of human experience and expands the frontier of man's control of environment. Physical features and environmental conditions that may appear unfavourable or difficult at one stage may prove to be potentially rich at another stage. For example, the hunter-gatherers preferred to live on the edge of the forests or what we have today as frontier zones, while incipient farmers had to come down to the riverine plains. Here again early farmers in the absence of an iron ploughshare preferred to restrict themselves to lighter soils to the west of the Ganga-Yamuna doab. Only with the coming of iron could the peasantry venture to open up the rich alluvial plains of Gangetic northern India and conquer the thick vegetation and heavier, fertile soil.

1.3 BASIC PHYSIOGRAPHICAL DIVISIONS

Let us now define the physical features of the sub-continent and the characteristics of the

regions created by them. The basic physiographic divisions are three :

- i) Himalayan uplands,
- ii) Indo-Gangetic plains and,
- iii) Peninsular India.

Each one of these can be further sub-divided. The Himalayas are considered to be still rising. Large quantities of alluvium are continuously carried down into the plains from these mountains owing to weathering and erosion. Fed by the Himalayan snows the three great river systems—Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra—tend to flow perennially. The alluvial plains of northern India extend in the form of an arc for about 3200 kms from the mouth of the Indus to the mouth of the Ganga. This stretch of land, about 320 kms wide, is full of potentialities. The Indus plains threw up the first civilization of the sub-continent while the Ganga plains have sustained and nurtured city life, state, society and imperial fabrics from the first millennium B.C.

The northern plains and the Peninsular India are separated by a large intermediate zone, which in the absence of a better terminology, may be called central India, extending from Gujarat to western Orissa over a stretch of about 1600 kms. The Aravali hills in Rajasthan separate the Indus plain from the peninsula. The intermediate zone is characterised by the presence of the Vindhyan and Satpura ranges and the Chotanagpur plateau covering portions of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. This region can be subdivided into four sub-regions :

- i) the land of the Rajputs between Udaipur and Jaipur,
- ii) the Malwa plateau around Ujjain which was more popularly known as Avanti in ancient times,
- iii) Vidarbha or the sub-region around Nagpur and,
- iv) the Chattisgarh plains in eastern Madhya Pradesh which bore the name Dakshina Kosala in the ancient period.

Although, generally speaking, communication and movement across the intermediate zone were never easy, there have been contacts between these four apparently isolated pockets, and between this region and other physiographic divisions.

On the southern edge of the intermediate zone or central India begins the formation called Peninsular India. It is an old land mass with every sign of stability. The rocky formation gently slopes from west to east, and four major rivers flow into the bay of Bengal. These four rivers—Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri have produced alluvial plains and helped the creation of nuclear areas in the plains and deltas enabling the sustenance of cultural growth for prolonged period continuously through ancient, medieval and modern times.

The Narmada and the Tapti, however, have a westward flow and run into the Arabian sea in Gujarat after traversing a long distance in hilly central India. The well known feature of the region is the Deccan plateau.

It extends from the Vindhyas in the north to the southern limits of Karnataka. The black soil in Maharashtra and in the adjoining parts of central India is especially rich for it retains moisture and is considered to be "self ploughing". Therefore, it helps in overcoming other kinds of limitations imposed by less annual rainfall and irrigational difficulties. The soil yields good crops of cotton, millets, peanuts and oil seeds. Not surprisingly therefore the early farming cultures (Chalcolithic) in western and central India emerged in this area. In the west the plateau terminates with the Western Ghats and in the east its contours are marked by the Eastern Ghats which separate it from the eastern coastal plains which are wider compared to the narrow plains in the west. The Nilgiris and the Cardamom hills are considered to be off-shoots of the basic peninsular formation.

Check Your Progress 1

1 Mark (✓) the correct statements. The knowledge of physical Geography:

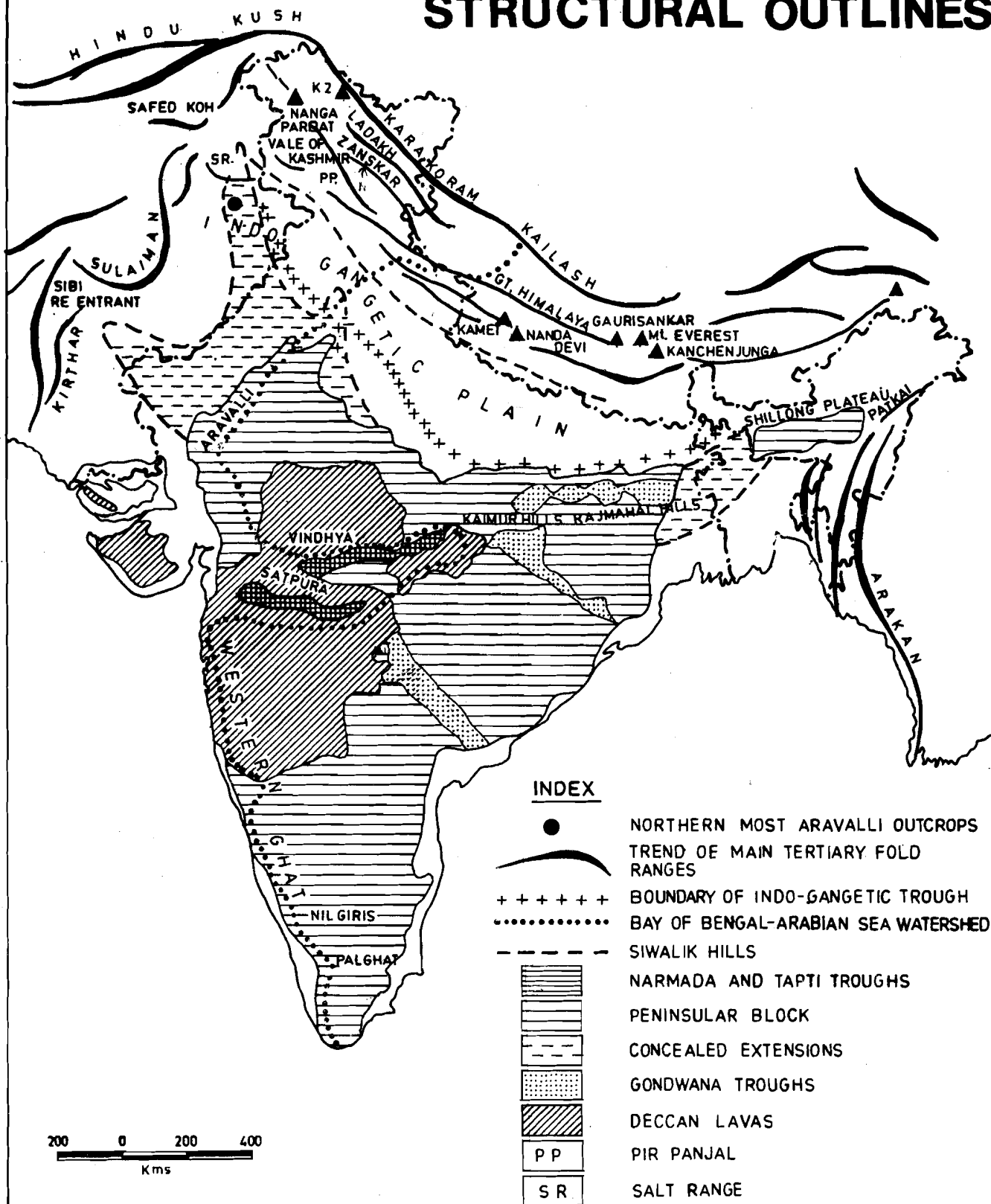
- i) helps in understanding the life patterns of the people who resided in those regions
- ii) is of no help in determining the nature of cultural developments in the past
- iii) is not at all relevant for students of history
- iv) confines you only to the study of the regions.

2 Discuss the physical features responsible for the rise of Magadha. Answer in about ten lines.

.....

.....

INDIA STRUCTURAL OUTLINES



3 Fill in the blanks:

- i) Geographical factors (help us/do not help us) in determining the factors behind the (rise and decline/flooding) of Magdha.
- ii) Human beings (attempt to/successfully) control nature.
- iii) The basic physiographic divisions in India are (five/two/three).
- iv) The intermediary zone may consist of (basic physiographic/sub-regions).

1.4 REGIONAL PHYSICAL FEATURES

So far we have considered features of the broad geographic divisions at a general plane. Let us not take up the specific major geographical units, which at instances conform to linguistic divisions, and look into their physical traits from a historical perspective.

1.4.1 The Himalayas and the Western Frontier

The Himalayas can be divided into three broad units:

- eastern,
- western, and
- central.

The eastern mountains run to the east of the Brahmaputra in the north-south extending from Assam to south China. Although, the routes through the eastern mountains are difficult, that has not prevented the flow of cultural influences from Southeast Asia and South China in the prehistoric and historic times.

The central Himalayan region, extending from Bhutan to Chitral, lies at the fringe of the great table-land of Tibet. There have been trade and other contacts between India and Tibet across this frontier.

The narrow Hindu Kush range extends South-westward from the Himalayas deep into Afghanistan, covering ancient Gandhara. Geographically and culturally western Afghanistan has affinities with eastern Iran but south-east Afghanistan has been culturally close with the Indian sub-continent right since the neolithic stage. The Khyber pass and other passes and the Kabul river link it with the Indus plains. It is no surprise therefore that the site of Shortugai in this part of Afghanistan was a trading out-post of the Harappan civilization. Ancient towns like Kabul and Kandahar are situated on trade routes between Iran and India.

The desert conditions of south-western Afghanistan are noticed in a more intense form as one moves into Baluchistan. Pastoralism has been a more profitable adaptational strategy since the neolithic times in the region. The coast of Baluchistan, which is called Makran, is not very inviting for human settlements. For example, when Alexander on his way back from the Indian campaigns led a section of his army across the Makran coast he suffered heavy losses in men because of the paucity of food and water. The region has been some kind of a nodal point, for routes to Central Asia and China on the one hand and Persia and farther west on the other cut through it.

The great routes connecting the Indian plains with Iran and Central Asia through Afghanistan run through the Gomal, Bolan and Khyber passes. These routes have brought in traders, invaders and varied cultural influences all through the historic times and even before. The

Greeks, Sakas, Kushanas, Hunas and others made their entry into India through these routes. Buddhism and other aspects of Indian civilization entered Afghanistan and Central Asia through these passes. Historically thus the Afghan and Baluchistan hills have an important frontier zone.

1.4.2 The Indus Plains

The passes lead to the rich plains of the Indus, which can be divided into two regions :

- Punjab, and
- Sind

Punjab (today divided between India and Pakistan) literally means the land of the five rivers. These five tributaries of the Indus flowing across a vast alluvial plain have made the region the bread-basket of the sub- continent. The eastern part of these plains merges into the Ganga basin. Punjab has been a meeting place and melting pot of cultures. Pre-existing and intrusive elements of cultures have fused here. The prosperity and strategic location of Punjab has always invited invaders.

The lower Indus valley and the delta constitute Sind. Geographically between the Baluchistan hills on the north-west and the Thar desert on the south-east. However, there have been historical links with Gujarat. Rainfall in the region is extremely low but the alluvial soil is very fertile. Sind is situated by the Indus and produces large quantities of rice and wheat. As mentioned earlier the Indus plain had nurtured the sub-continent's first urban culture during the 2nd millennium B.C. Two of its major cities Harappa and Mohenjodaro are located in Punjab and Sind respectively.

1.4.3 Gangetic Northern India

The Ganga basin climatically is more humid than the Indus region and the annual rainfall starting with 50 cms in the Indo-Gangetic divide steadily rises to 200 cms by the time it reaches Bengal. The Ganga plains can be divided into three sub-regions :

- Upper,
- Middle, and
- lower

The Upper plains in western and central Uttar Pradesh largely include the Doab. This has been an area of conflict and cultural synthesis. There is increasing evidence of the extension of the Harappan culture into this zone. This was also the centre of the Painted Grey Ware Culture and the scene of pulsating activity in the Later Vedic Period.

At the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna at the terminal point of the Doab is Allahabad (ancient Prayaga). The Middle Ganga plains correspond to eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This is where ancient Kosala, Kasi and Magadha were situated. It was the centre of city life, money economy and trade since the 6th century B.C. This region provided the basis for Mauryan imperial expansion and it continued to be politically important till the Gupta period (5th century A.D.).

The Upper and Middle Ganga plains are geographically defined by the Himalayas on the north and the Central Indian hills on the south. The Lower plains are co- terminus with the province of Bengal. The wide plains of Bengal are formed by the alluvium brought by the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. High rainfall in low-lying plains created forest and marshy conditions which made early settlements in Bengal a difficult proposition. The fertility of the heavy alluvial soil could be exploited only with greater utilization and control of iron technology. Urban culture spread into this region from the Middle plains relatively late. Given the kind of environment, ponds have been an observable feature from ancient times in Bengal and fish has become a part of the diet of all sections of people.

The Ganga plains have nurtured greater number of settlements and have sustained a higher population density than other similar-regions. It has been the heartland of Indian civilization from the first millennium B.C., through the classical phase, up to the present. Adjoining the Bengal plains is the long Assam valley produced by the Brahmaputra. It spreads over more than 600 kms. Culturally Assam is close to Bengal but in terms of historical development it emerges as a late starter like Orissa.

1.4.4 Eastern, Western and Central India

Central India, as we have noticed earlier, is an entirely different region and does not have a central focal point. It is a hilly region where the hills do not rise to any great height but are broken by steep slopes and intersected by valleys. The hills normally run in an east-west orientation. However, the Aravalis in the north-western part of this physiographic division extend from south-west to north-east. The Aravalis almost bisect Rajasthan, the desert state. The south-eastern part of the state to the east of the Aravalis is part of a sub-region called Malwa. Because of the fertility of the soil the region yields good crops even in the absence of irrigation. Chalcolithic settlements are distributed in good numbers in the region. Given its geographical location it must have acted as a bridge between the Harappans and the other Chalcolithic communities in Central India and the northern Deccan. Culturally it emerged as an extension of the northern plains in later periods. In the east the Chattisgarh plains on the Upper Mahanadi is a fertile minor region with good rainfall and paddy yield. From the 4th-5th century historical developments there were akin to those in the rolling uplands of western Orissa. There have been cultural and political interactions between the areas due to geographical contiguity.

Most of what we have designated as Central India constitutes the present Madhya Pradesh. Movement from the north to the south is impeded by the Vindhya and Satpura ranges and by the Narmada and Tapti rivers. The Central Indian belt, especially southern Bihar, western Orissa and eastern Madhya Pradesh, has been an area of tribal concentration. Nevertheless, it has also been a zone of slow and steady penetration. Cultural influences from adjoining regions have influenced and integrated the tribals into the dominant caste-peasant base of Indian society from early historic times and more so from the Gupta period.

Gujarat is situated on the western fringe of the Central Indian belt. It consists of three natural divisions: Saurashtra, Anarta (N. Gujarat) and Lata (S. Gujarat). Semiarid wind blown-soils characterise Anarta and the fertile area on the western coast constitutes Lata. The central peninsula of Gujarat is called Kathiawar. The low-lying Rann of Kutch is another feature which during the monsoons turns into a swamp. In spite of these physical sub-divisions Gujarat has a cultural identity and unity because it is broadly bounded by the Vindhyas and Western Ghats in the east and by the desert on the north. Although it appears to have been a zone of isolation actually it is a region of continuous ancient settlements dating back from the Harappan period. Saurashtra, on account of its geographical closeness to the Indus, experienced an extension of the Harappan civilization. It has often been a transition zone between Sind and lands farther west and India. The plain here is enriched by the alluvium brought from the Central Indian hills by the Narmada, Tapti, Sabarmati and Mahi rivers. Because of its protected position and the lengthy coast line Gujarat has been the focus of coastal and external trade for more than four thousand years.

To the south-west of the delta of the Ganga at the eastern end of the hills of Central India are the coastal plains of Orissa. The coastal plains are centred largely on the Mahanadi delta though there are some other rivers too joining the Bay of Bengal on the same littoral. Western Orissa is an extension of the Central Indian hills and as mentioned earlier in the context of the Chattisgarh plain it shares some of the same features. Thus, there are two physiographic divisions in Orissa exhibiting uneven patterns of growth. The fertile coastal plain with a richer agrarian base has provided a focal point and has been the centre of socio-cultural development. Orissa began to develop her linguistic and cultural identity late in the first millennium A.D.

1.4.5 Peninsular India

The Deccan Plateau and the surrounding coastal plains define the contours of Peninsular India. The coastal plains in the east and extreme south are broad while those in the west are narrow. They are at their narrowest between Bombay and Palghat. The plateau is divided into three major regions which largely correspond to the states of Maharashtra, Andhra and Karnataka. Maharashtra, in addition to other areas, includes the northern Deccan plateau. Cultural influences have been diffused to the south from the Deccan and this must have been possible because barring the Western Ghats there are no other dense forests there. Maharashtra seems to have a natural boundary with Andhra for the boundary line coincides with the distribution of the fertile black soil. Across the boundary one encounters the red soil of Telangana, which fails to retain moisture. Therefore, Telangana has become a land of tanks and other forms of artificial irrigation. The environmental difference with a bearing on the growth of early settlements and cultures could not have been more striking. While the early

Neolithic settlers in south-western Andhra based themselves on pastoralism as an adaptational strategy, the chalcolithic communities of the northern Deccan increasingly relied on agriculture. Karnataka includes the southwestern Deccan which except for small areas is not covered by the Deccan lava. In addition a part of the Western Ghats and the western coastal plain are included in the state. The southern part of the state is better watered and more hospitable for human settlement than the north. The dividing line between Maharashtra and Karnataka is not marked by any natural features. The limitations imposed by environment are amply borne out by the comparatively poor cultural remains of the Neolithic folks of the region.

Among the four south Indian states Andhra is the largest. It includes a number of sub-regions like Telangana, the rich coastal plains, Rayalaseema etc. The northwestern part of the state on the Deccan plateau, as already mentioned, is called Telangana. The reddish soils are not rich and the main crops are millets, pulses and oil seeds. In the east a part of the Eastern Ghats and the Eastern coastal plain, from near about Mahendragiri on the borders of Orissa in the north to Tamil Nadu in the south, with the combined Krishna-Godavari delta as its epicentre are included in Andhra. It is essentially a rice growing area. The area between the two rivers on the coast, known in early times as Vengi, is considered a ricebowl. Like the Raichur doab, between the Krishna and Tungabhadra, it was fought over frequently all through ancient history.

1.4.6 The Extreme South

The Deccan plateau fragments into isolated blocks like the Nilgiri and the Cardamom hills in the extreme south. They roughly divide the western and eastern coastal plains. The wide Eastern coastal plain in the south and its adjoining hinterland constitute Tamil Nadu. The littoral districts produce an abundance of rice and the Kaveri plain and its delta constitute its epicentre. The rivers in the region being seasonal, the peasants of the region have relied on tank irrigation since the Pallava-Chola times. The unirrigated pockets produce millets, pulses and oils seeds. Interestingly, these ecological variations which supported alternative, at times interrelated, ways of life are attested to in the earliest literature of the land, the Sangam literature. Geographically, linguistically and culturally the region has evolved an individuality of its own. The western coastal plain too broadens in the extreme south and corresponds to the region known as Malabar or the present state of Kerala. In addition to rice and other crops Kerala produces pepper and spices which have been traded with the west since the post-Mauryan times. From Tamil Nadu the littoral is accessible through the Palghat gap and the southern end of the Western Ghats. Relatively isolated by land, Kerala has been open to the sea and interestingly first the Christian and then the Muslim influence here came by sea. It may be noted that both Kerala and Tamil Nadu are densely populated like the plains of the Ganga.

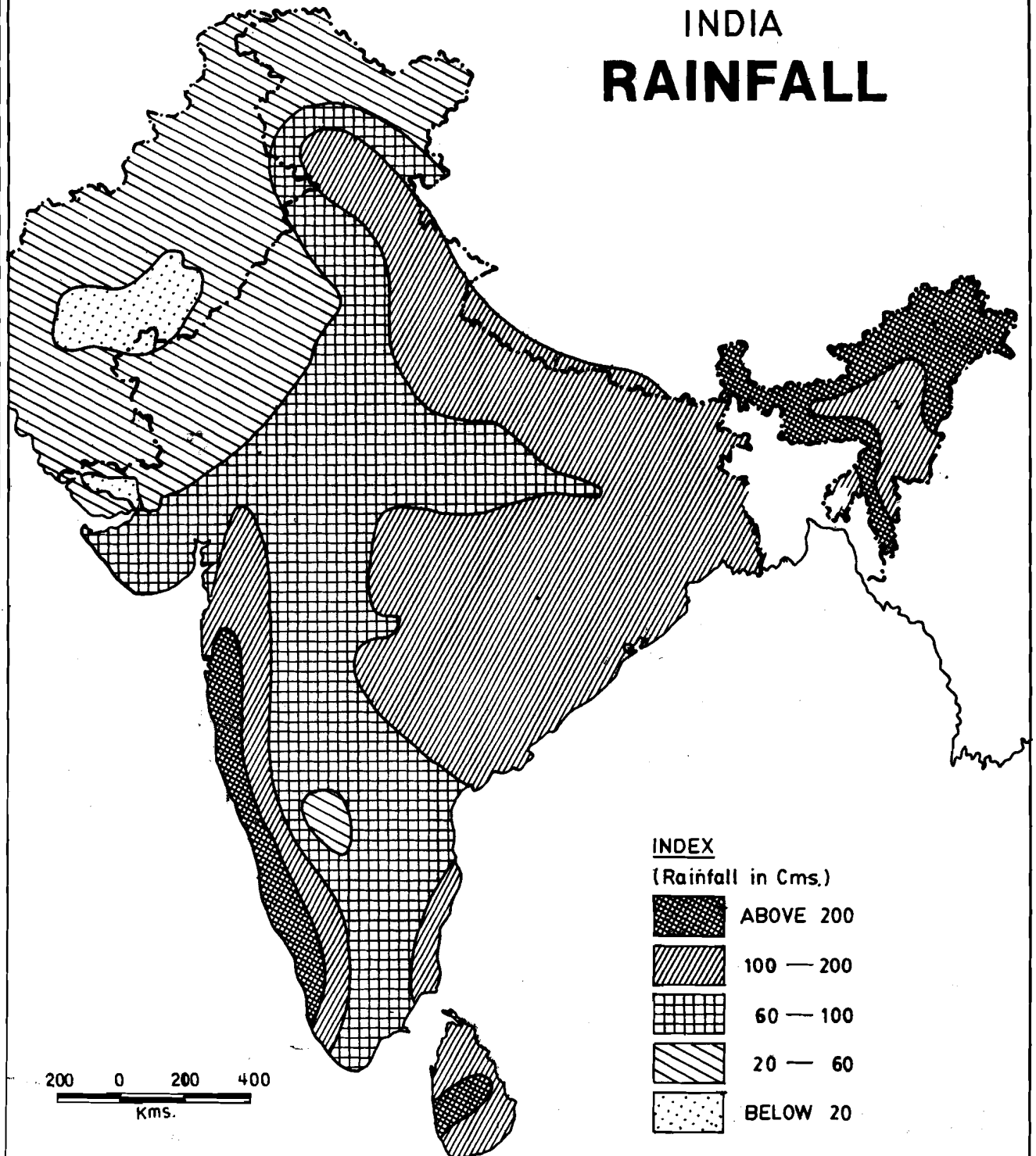
Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - i) The eastern Himalayan region was not affected by cultural influences from China.
 - ii) Harappa is located in Punjab.
 - iii) Ganga plain has nurtured greatest number of human settlements.
 - iv) Coastal plains of Deccan plateau are very broad between Bombay and Palghat.
- 2 Fill in the blanks.
 - i) Himalayas can be divided into (five/three) broad (regions/units).
 - ii) Rann of Kutch turns into a (sea/swamp) during the (Monsoon/Autumn) season.
 - iii) The unirrigated lands in the extreme south produce (Wheat/Barely/Millets) and (oilseeds/rice).
 - iv) Telangana has become a land of (rivers/tanks) and forms of artificial (cultivation/irrigation).

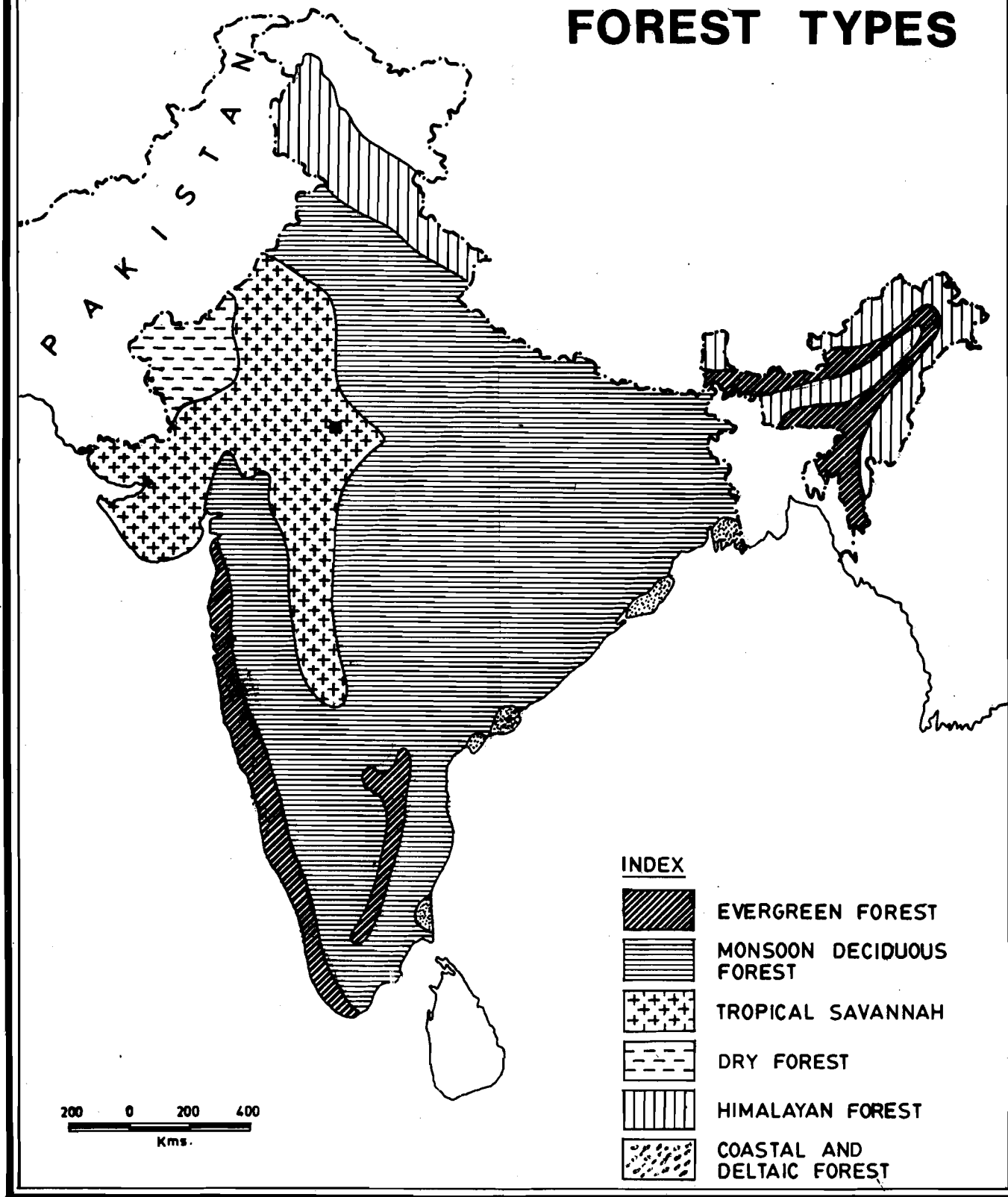
1.5 LET US SUM UP

The physical divisions in the sub-continent are often roughly co-terminus with the linguistic regions. The latter in turn have developed and asserted their cultural identities. The people of the different physical divisions have varied tastes, food-habits, and dress sense. This is derived

INDIA RAINFALL



INDIA FOREST TYPES



from the environmental setting and the mode of life and the manner of resource utilisation that has evolved within their frontiers. The uneven pattern of growth both between and within the macroregions may be explained with reference to the availability or non-availability of resource potentialities and the form of human and technological intervention. The major river basins of the country which have an annual rainfall between 50 and 100 cms. and are capable of sustaining agricultural communities on a large scale have been fully colonized through the ages (for rainfall see map 3). Areas with lesser or greater rainfall suffer from problems of aridity and thick jungle vegetation respectively and are not best suited for agriculture. There is a striking correlation between the optimal rainfall zone and the areas cleared for cultivation in the sub-continent (see map 4). The unfolding of the historical process therefore has neither been even nor uniform all over.

The Himalayas in the north and the ocean in the south, south-west and south-east create a superficial view of the isolation of the sub-continent. Cultural influences have been exchanged across these frontiers and there have been maritime contacts with the West, West Asia and Southeast Asia. Internally, even the rugged, difficult terrain of Central India has not really impeded the movement of ideas and influences between the varied regions of the country. Admittedly, geography and environment influence historical developments considerably, even if they do not determine it entirely.

1.6 KEY WORDS

Adaptational Strategy: The manner in which adjustments are made to a new environment or culture by human beings.

Alluvial Plains: Plains formed by deposition of silt, sand etc. by the river.

Caste-peasant Base: Referring to early settled agricultural society whose members were socially classified along caste lines. These members were dependent on the produce of those of their counter parts engaged in cultivation.

Chalcolithic Settlements: Settlements which represent an age when both stone and copper artefacts were used.

Frontier Zone: Area at the outskirts of an agricultural settlement. Normally such an area has some socio-economic links with the main settlement. For example, nomads moving, around such an area will supply milk, sheep skin, wool etc. to the main settlement.

Geographical Contiguity: Areas physically adjacent or side by side.

Linguistic Division: Division of physical area according to respective languages spoken in the area.

Littoral: On the sea coast.

Painted Grey Ware Culture: The culture associated with grey coloured pottery found in Ganga Doab region.

Pastoralism: It relates to the occupation in which animals are reared.

Physiographical Divisions: Refers to physical/geographical divisions of India.

Technological Intervention: The impact of new techniques and knowledge in developing the resource potential of a region.

1.7 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 i)
- 2 Your answer should include high fertile soils, irrigation facilities, proximity to various resources like stone, timber etc. See Sub-sec. 1.2.1
- 3 i) helps us, rise and decline
 ii) attempt to
 iii) three
 iv) sub-regions

Check Your Progress 2

1 i) (X) ii) ☒ iii) ☒ iv) (X)

- 2 i) three, units
ii) swamp, monsoon
iii) millets, oilseeds
iv) tanks, irrigation

UNIT 2 REGIONS IN INDIAN HISTORY: FORMATION AND CHARACTERISTICS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Dynamics of Regional Transformation
 - 2.2.1 Uneven Patterns of the emergence of Historical Regions
 - 2.2.2 The Ceramic Evidence
 - 2.2.3 The Literary Evidence
- 2.3 Force of Regions in Indian History
 - 2.3.1 The Chakravatia Concept
- 2.4 The Hierarchy of Regions
 - 2.4.1 Major Geographical Influences
 - 2.4.2 Nuclear Regions
 - 2.4.3 Settlement Structure in Time and Space
- 2.5 Formation of Some Regions in Early India
 - 2.5.1 The Gangetic Basin
 - 2.5.2 The Tamil Country
 - 2.5.3 The Deccan: Andhra and Maharashtra
 - 2.5.4 Kalinga and Ancient Orissa
 - 2.5.5 The North-West
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Key Words
- 2.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to explain :

- Why it is necessary to know about regions if one has to understand different stages of Indian history,
- How regions emerged, and
- In what way the nature of a region could differ from that of the other.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 1 we have seen that the Indian subcontinent is constituted by a number of regions and that each region has some special characteristics of its own. In the course of the historical evolution of the country, the regions came to acquire special cultural features as well and in many ways—in the sense of shared historical tradition, in language, in social organization, in art forms—it is possible to recognize differences between one region and another. In Indian history, therefore, there have been dual processes of the evolution of common social and cultural norms and institutions as well as consolidation of the structures of recognizable regions.

It has also to be remembered that in history the processes of the emergence of regions have been uneven. Therefore, in the past, as induced even today, great dissimilarities in pattern of historical change, existed between different regions, although no region has ever remained completely isolated. This unit is concerned with elucidating the processes of the formation of regions in Indian history and with showing how they differed from one another. An understanding of the nature of regions constituting the Indian sub-continent is necessary to understand how the stages of the evolution of Indian society varied in space and time.

2.2 THE DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The differences between regions and regional cultures go back in time and can possibly be dated to the beginnings of adaptive subsistence strategies, that is, food production. The beginnings of agriculture and agrarian economy in the main river basins of the sub-continent, being essentially a process and not an event, were spread over several millennia. While Mehrgarh in the Kachhi plain (now in Pakistan) experienced early agricultural activities before 6,000 B.C. and the Indus region experienced it in the 4th-3rd millennia the Gangetic valley saw the advent of agriculture at Koldihwa (U.P) in 5000 + B.C., at Chirand (Bihar) in the second half of the 3rd millennium B.C. and at Atranjikhara (in the Doab) in the first half of the 2nd millennium B.C. In the Ganga valley, however, the beginning of full-fledged, settled agricultural activity, farming villages and the other associated traits like the emergence of towns, trade and the state system go back to the middle of the first millennium B.C.

There were various pockets in Central and Peninsular India where this transition took place only in the concluding centuries of the first millennium B.C. Similarly in the river basins of the Ganga, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri agricultural communities flourished and carried forward the civilizational process. At the same time, however, large pockets in areas such as Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat and Central India, being relatively isolated or isolated regions, remained for a long time in a stage of primitive economy, largely untouched by any such development. Finally, when the transition to the historical period took place in some of the relatively isolated regions there was not only a time gap but also perceptible differences in the nature and formation of the regions. Cultural influences from the already developed regional epicentres had a formative bearing on the development processes in these isolated areas. It is no surprise therefore, that some regions have advanced more rapidly than others and there are still others which have lagged behind.

2.2.1 Uneven Patterns of the emergence of Historical Regions

The uneven pattern of cultural growth and the differential configuration of historical forces in the numerous regions were, as we have seen in Unit-1, greatly influenced by geography. The uneven development of regions can be demonstrated through interesting historical situations. For example in the second half of the third millennium B.C. one encounters mesolithic cultures in Gujarat and at the same time neolithic cattle-keepers were traversing the landscape of the Deccan. What is striking is that the mature, advanced Harappan civilization co-existed with these cultures in other regions. Consequently there is evidence for interaction between cultures and regions at different levels of growth. Such tendencies have persisted all through Indian history. To put it differently, while the Indus and Saraswati basins were colonized in the third millennium B.C., the first large scale agricultural communities of the Deccan, Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Gujarat belong essentially to the Iron Age, and can be placed in the second half of the first millennium B.C.

With the advent of iron we see rapid horizontal spread of material culture based on settled agriculture. By the third century B.C. we see a certain homogeneity in the material culture of Gangetic northern India and the fringes of Central India. Although on the basis of the geographical distribution of the Ashokan inscriptions (details in Block 5) a certain measure of cultural uniformity is normally assumed for the sub-continent, the process of the emergence of early historical, literate period with a complex social structure in the area south of the Vindhyas acquired momentum during and after the Mauryas.

In fact, the post-Mauryan period i.e., 200 B.C.-A.D. 300 was the formative period for most of the Deccan and South India. The archaeological date excavated from historic settlements in these regions support this line of argument. It may be added that vast areas of the intermediate zone or forested hills of Central India were never thoroughly colonized and, therefore, they continue to provide shelter and isolation to tribes at different stages of primitive economy. In the sub-continent civilization and a more complex culture with hierarchical social organisation reached different regions in different periods and the regional spread of a more advanced material culture was unevenly balanced.

2.2.2 The Ceramic Evidence

Pottery, because of its indestructible quality, is a reliable identifying mark of a culture and an

important means of archaeological classification. Different cultures are identified by their characteristic pottery. We have the Ochre-Coloured Pottery Ware (OCP) which is dated earlier than 1000 B.C., the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) which roughly dated between 800-400 B.C., the Black and Red Ware (BRW) which lies in between the two and the Northern Black Polished (NBP) Ware which is dated between 500-100 B.C. The first three pottery types are basically encountered in the Indo-Gangetic divide and the upper Ganga valley, including the Doab. The Northern Black Polished Ware (NBP) has its centre of origin in the middle Gangetic plain and spread out into Central India and the Deccan during the Mauryan period.

The distribution of pottery types gives us some idea of the territorial limits of a culture and the stages of its expansion. The Indo-Gangetic divide and upper Ganga basin experienced the emergence of a new cultural pattern first in the second half of the second millennium B.C. and then there was a gradual eastward spread which, during the Mauryan period, seems to have gone beyond the Gangetic heart land.

2.2.3 The Literary Evidence

Ancient Indian literature also provides evidence regarding the geographical expansion of a cultural pattern. The geographical focus of the Rig Vedic period was the Saptasindhu (land of the Indus and its tributaries) and Indo-Gangetic divide. In the Later Vedic period the Doab became the epicentre and in the Age of the Buddha the middle Gangetic valley (Kosala and Magadha) came into prominence. It may be mentioned that the stages of geographical spread coincided with progress in material culture. The term *rastra* in the sense of territory came into use in the Later Vedic period and we see the rise of small monarchies and states in areas such as Kuru and Panchala. In the Age of the Buddha (6th century B.C.) the sixteen *Mahajanapadas* (large territorial kingdoms) emerged. Interestingly, with the exception of Gandhara in the North-West, Avanti in Malwa and Asmaka in the Deccan the *Mahajanapadas* were mostly concentrated in the upper and middle Gangetic valley. Regions such as Kalinga (ancient coastal Orissa), Andhra, Vanga (ancient Bengal), Rajasthan and Gujarat find no mention in literature focusing on that period, suggesting thereby that they were yet to emerge on the historical stage.

Kingdoms to the south of the Vindhyas like Kalinga were mentioned for the first time by Panini in the 5th century B.C. The Tamil Country in the far south was yet to register its transition to the historical period. The emergence and formation of the various regions, therefore, was a long drawn out process. "Hence it is not surprising that this difference in the technology and socio-economic development of the various regions should have been at the root of the later cultural divergences".

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×)?
 - i) The uneven development of regions cannot be described through historical situations. ()
 - ii) Cultural developments in the already developed regions made a bearing on isolated regions. ()
 - iii) The process of the emergence of region has been even all over. ()
 - iv) Different cultures are identified by their characteristic pottery. ()
 - v) Literature is of no help in identifying regions. ()
- 2 Discuss in about five lines the various kinds of pottery and the period it is associated with.

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2.3 FORCE OF REGIONS IN INDIAN HISTORY

The village has been the basic socially organised unit in all regions, securing subsistence for its inhabitants, supporting urban life, state structures and so on. However, some regions exhibit a

greater density of population, rural settlements and urban centres and have regularly given rise to strong expansive states. They are also characterized by a continuous record of settlement and habitation from the neolithic-chalcolithic times. By contrast, other regions do not share these traits. The difference between regions may be explained in terms of :

- geography
- the manner and period of the spread of material culture, and
- the overall configuration of historical forces such as population, technology, social organisation, communications etc.

A combination of these factors helped in the shaping and development of the personality of the regions.

Owing to the development of distinct and strong regional personalities and the strength of regional forces the Indian sub-continent was never completely politically united. Some regions owing to their inner strength tried to expand and attain pan-Indian or supra-regional status but such experiments were not entirely unqualified success stories. The Mauryas, Tughlaqs, Mughals and the British provided a semblance of political unity. However, it must be noted that none of them succeeded in imposing political unity on all the geographic units and culture areas, though the British came very close to it. Central India or broadly speaking the intermediate zone and the extreme end of Peninsular India have always remained outside the pale of any strong, expansive pan-Indian power. Again the Vindhyas, as noticed in Unit-1, have somewhat succeeded in separating the histories of Northern India and the Deccan peninsula. Similarly, the Aravalis extending from the mouth of the Gulf of Cambay to the Delhi gap constitute another frontier line. In fact, this has been a very effective border. Nevertheless, the lower Indus basin and Gujarat have been historical and cultural centres of activity for very long periods. Thus, while large-scale centralised states did not endure for long periods, the ancient kingdoms of Magadha, Kosala, Avanti, Andhra, Kalinga, Maharashtra, Chera, Pandya, Chola, etc. continued to thrive, under one dynasty or the other, and under one regional name or the other. Their remarkable persistence may be explained in terms of the convergence of political and cultural boundaries over most periods, in these natural regions.

2.3.1 The Chakravatia Concept

The Chakravartin (universal emperor) concept which was an important ideal in ancient Indian political theory sheds further light on the problem under discussion. The ideal *Chakravartin* was supposed to become a universal conqueror and achieve universal dominance. The realm of the emperor (*Chakravarti Kshetra*) or his universe is equated by Kautilya's *Arthashastra* with the region between the Himalayas and the sea. The said area, interestingly, is co-terminus with the Indian sub-continent. Later, many other writings also echo this ideal again and again. The *Asvamedha* sacrifice was performed by a ruler who claimed the status of a universal monarch. In ancient Indian political ideas the *Chakravartin* concept remained a vital force. Kingship was thus always associated with universal dominion.

However, neither Kautilya nor his successors describe how a pan-Indian empire was to be administered. What seems possible is that the *Chakravartin* ideal meant the subordination of rivals, extension of authority over their territories and thereby the expansion of the empire. This does not mean that the subjugated territories always became a part of a uniform administrative system or that strict control was exercised over them. In other words, it meant the demonstration and exercise of superior political power which had nothing to do with such aspects as administrative regulation, management and organization.

In spite of such limitations of the ideal what is important is that its realization was prevented by the strong personality of the natural regions and the strength of regionalism. The desire to politically unite the sub-continent continued to linger on even if such aspirations remained largely unfulfilled. This is largely borne out by the inscriptions of the early historic period when even petty rulers performed *Asvamedha* sacrifices as evidence of their might and made tall claims about the extent of their sovereignty and kingdom. This, in fact, is a clear cut example which highlights the difference between the actual and the ideal and emphasises the existence of a range of differentiated natural regions all through our history.

2.4 THE HIERARCHY OF REGIONS

The term 'region' like the word 'country' is a broad inclusive term and in the present context its meaning has to be clearly specified. Geographers and social scientists have defined and delineated regions differently keeping in view the requirements of their investigation. We have thus such expressions as 'linguistic regions', 'caste regions', 'physical regions', 'natural regions', 'cultural regions', etc. However, these regional frontiers broadly correspond and appear to be coterminous, though not always very neatly. The boundaries of the physical and the natural regions converge. The natural regions happen to be independent culture areas with their own configurations of language, caste, family and kinship organization and historical tradition. However, there need not be any uniformity between two adjoining regions. Even in geographically proximate regions, as we have seen above, diverse forms of culture co-existed throughout history. The patterns of historical development in the country and the regional unevenness of the transition to the historical stage suggests the existence of a hierarchy of regions. An understanding of this hierarchy may focus on the differential characteristics of the regions and explain their chronologically phased formation and emergence.

2.4.1 Major Geographical Influences

The "major structure-lines of Indian historical geography" or important geographical features of Indian history such as the Narmada-Chhota Nagpur line or the line running from the Gulf of Cambay to Mathura, constituted by the Aravalis have considerably influenced the pattern of cultural diffusion in the sub-continent. We have four great divisions:

- The Indus plains, prone to influences from Central and West Asia,
- The Gangetic plains, which begin on the Delhi-Mathura line and have absorbed all kinds of political and cultural influences coming through the north western frontier,
- The Central Indian intermediate zone, with Gujarat and Orissa as the two extreme points, and
- Peninsular India, south of the Narmada.

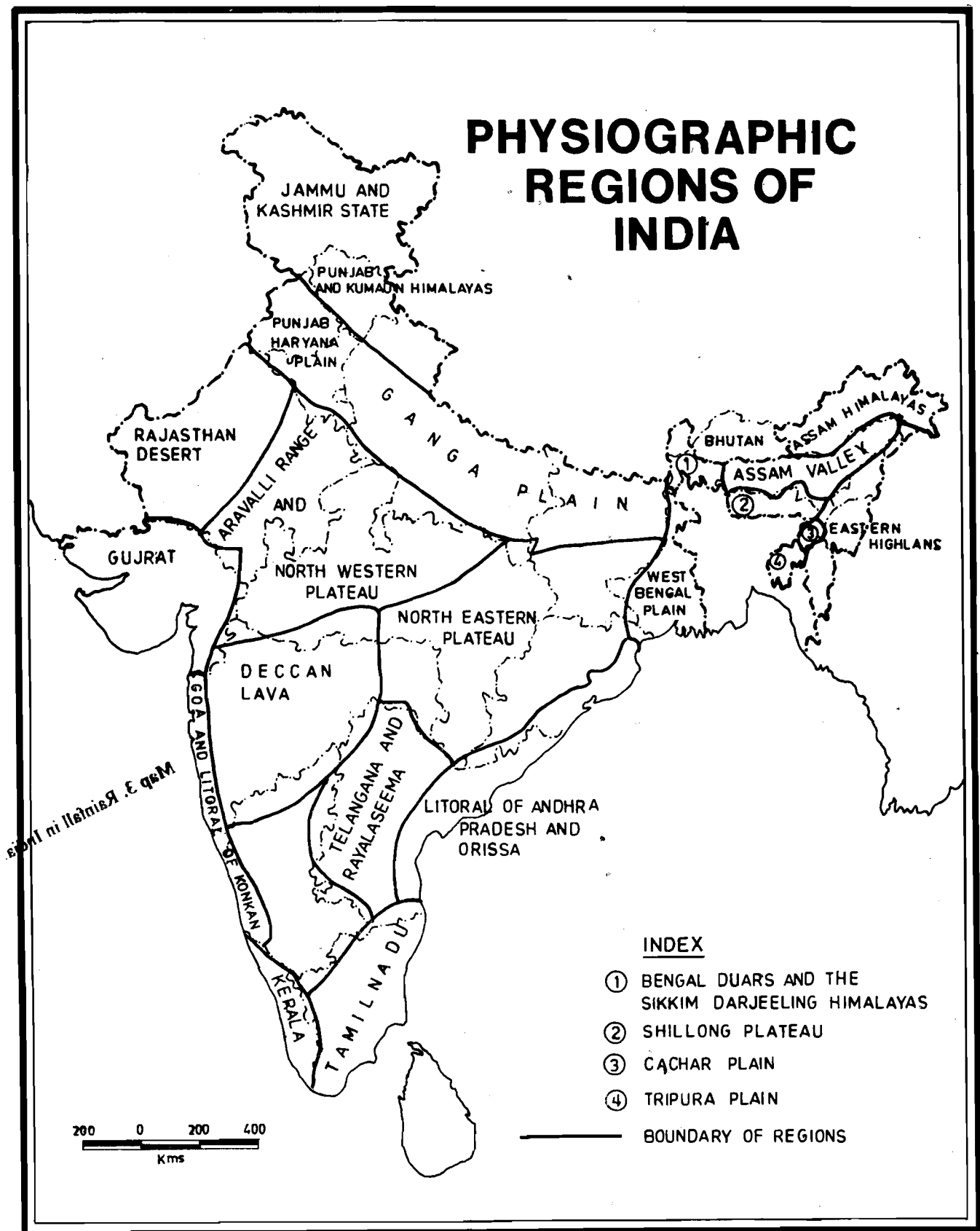
To the north and west of the Aravali line the overall cultural landscape appears to be different. Only some areas of Rajasthan and Gujarat responded to the mainstream of cultural development of the Gangetic valley in the early historical period.

The difference is somewhat more clear in the case of Punjab. After the Rig-Vedic period there seems to have been arrested growth in the Punjab. The persistence of non-monarchical *janapadas* in the region till the Gupta period suggests autonomous development. It also indicates weak property in land and poor agricultural growth. The absence of land grant inscriptions, a feature common in Gupta and post-Gupta times in the rest of the country, from the Punjab plains strengthens the assumption. Brahmanism never had deep roots in the Punjab plains, nor for that matter did the Varna structure become wholly acceptable. The Brahmanas rarely played an important role in society and the Kshatriyas soon faded out. The Khatris who claim to be Kshatriyas are usually found in professions associated with the Vaisya.

Punjab thus provides a good example of both late historical transition and regional variation from the perspective of the Ganga Valley. Similarly, the Narmada-Chhota Nagpur line is a major divide for, barring Gujarat, Maharashtra and Orissa, the rest of the cultural regions to the South of this line have a somewhat different individuality being largely influenced by the Tamil plains in the formative period. They share a separate zone of kinship organisation and caste hierarchy. Maharashtra, because of its contiguity with Malwa, which shares the Deccan lavas and has been the great bridge between the Ganga Valley and the Deccan, has had a different pattern of growth. It may not be out of place to mention that all major movements and territorial expansion into the South have taken this route.

2.4.2 Nuclear Regions

In Indian history we see the early emergence of some regions as perennial bases of power. In such regions we observe an uninterrupted succession of powerful kingdoms. In contrast, there were other less favoured regions too. Geographers and Historians thus speak in terms of perennial nuclear regions, areas of relative isolation and areas of isolation. The perennial nuclear regions correspond to the major river valleys, such as the Ganga, Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri, and they have been areas of attraction for human settlements. The



availability of resources and the convergence of trade and communication routes have added to their importance. Logically they have emerged as important centres of power. Let it, however, be remembered that geography and resource potentials only provide possibilities or set limitations and the nuclearity or otherwise of a region is linked with how historical factors converge on it. There are historical examples of the Kakatiya state of Warangal or the Chalukya state of Gujarat emerging outside the nuclear regions and such examples can be multiplied. Areas of relative isolation in Central India such as the country of the Bhils, Bastar and the Rajmahal hills, in terms of structure of settlements, agrarian history, social organization and state systems, differed from the nuclear regions. Because regions developed historically, the distinction between the three types of regions was not unalterably fixed once for all. Transformation from one category to the other was possible at a certain point.

2.4.3 Settlement Structure in Time and Space

The settlement structure of the regions did not remain static. Regions comprised villages, hamlets, towns and cities. Some regions like the middle Ganga plain and the Deccan were endowed with a greater number of towns. As we proceed to the post-Gupta period, the urban centres die out. There is increasing evidence of agrarian expansion and the emergence of new rural settlements. In some cases earlier tribal hamlets were transformed into peasant villages. There were differences between Brahmana and non-Brahmana settlements at the level of economic activity and social stratification. These differences gradually extended to areas which had initially remained peripheral to mainstream developments. They experienced transition from tribalism to more complex social structures. For example the basis for the rise of organised religion and state and of class society was laid in these regions. This transition would imply a proliferation of new settlements in these regions and a rise in population. Regions with a higher population density have always played a leading role in Indian history. The Ganga valley, the Tamil plains and the East coast were all regions with a higher density of population. Areas with resource potential and other attractions were naturally densely populated and a steady supply of manpower always added to the military strength of the State.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Discuss in about ten lines the factors which hindered the political unification of the Indian sub-continent.

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- 2 Discuss in about five lines what you understand by the concept of Chakravartin.

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3 Fill in the blanks:

- i) The natural regions happen to be (independent/dependant) culture areas.
- ii) Diverse forms of culture (never existed/co-existed) in history.
- iii) Cultural developments in Punjab were (different/similar) to those of the Gangetic valley.
- iv) Regions with a (higher/lesser) population density have played a leading role in Indian (Astronomy/History).

2.5 FORMATION OF SOME REGIONS IN EARLY INDIA

The Ganga-Yamuna doab, the Middle Ganga valley, Malwa, the Northern Deccan, Andhra, Kalinga (coastal Orissa) and the Tamil plains are the major perennial nuclear regions which emerged, quite early, as bases of power. But there have been smaller areas as well (which may be called sub-regions) which have preserved their individuality. The Konkan, Kanara and Chattisgarh fall in this category. Some areas such as the Raichur Doab between the Krishna and Tungabhadra and Vengi between the Godavari and Krishna have been continuously fought over for their agricultural resource potential, which could add immensely to the strength of the adjoining regions. The major nuclear regions have been the major agricultural areas with vast expanses of fertile alluvial. Let us now look into the dynamics and the pattern of the formation of regions by taking up a few illustrative examples.

2.5.1 The Gangetic Basin

The Ganga plain by virtue of its high agricultural productivity and rich population base has enjoyed a dominant position in the Indian sub-continent. No other region has had a comparable power base. However, the entire plain, as mentioned in Unit-1, is not a homogeneous geographical piece. We have already seen that the Middle Ganga plains, for a variety of reasons, emerged more successful than the Upper and Lower plains and by the time of the Mauryas had attained undisputed hegemony in the sub-continent. During the Rig Vedic period the centre for this was the Indo-Gangetic divide. In the 'Later Vedic' period, around 1000 B.C., the geographical focus shifted to the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. With it the eastward movement of the Vedic people had begun. However, the more important developments were the beginnings of settled agrarian life, with the help of the plough yoked to oxen, and consequently the emergence of the idea of territory and territorial kingdoms (*rastra*, *janapada*), Kuru and Panchala are good examples of such territories. By the 6th century B.C. the process of the emergence of *janapadas* tended to accelerate. For the first time we come to see the growth of *mahajanapadas* which incorporated smaller *janapadas* and contemporary literature puts their total number at sixteen.

Dense jungles had to be cleared for habitation by fire and metallic tools. In the paddy growing Middle Ganga Valley surplus generation was made possible by the deep ploughing iron ploughshare. It was necessitated by the growing population, a section of which like the rulers, officials, monks and priests did not engage in any kind of direct production. Agricultural surpluses helped in the rise and growth of towns. The distinctive pottery of the period was the NBP which appeared around 500 B.C. Simultaneously we come across the first system of coinage. The need for it was generated by regular trade and commerce. The spread of the NBP from Kosala and Magadha to such far flung areas as Taxila in north west, Ujjain in Western Malwa and Amaravati in coastal Andhra suggests the existence of organized commerce and a good communication network, which linked these towns among others. These developments were accompanied by sweeping social changes. Settled life helped in shedding pastoral and tribal traits. The Later Vedic people came into closer touch with the autochthons and there is evidence in Later Vedic literature for this interaction and inter-mingling. These developments together with some kind of division of labour first and next the diversification and specialization of occupations produced conditions congenial for the rise of the caste system within the four-fold *varna* frame.

The emergence of *Janapadas* and *Mahajanapadas* (for details see Block 4) signalled sweeping social, economic and political changes. The *grama* (village), *nigama* (a bigger settlement where commercial exchange also took place) and *nagara* (town) were the usual components of the *Janapada*. Woods and Jungles (*vana*) were also parts of it. A *Janapada* was basically a socio-cultural region. It provided the basis for state formation which actualised in the 6th century

B.C. Together with the rise of the *Mahajanapadas* we notice the growth of *Mahanagaras* (big cities) and the concomitant affluent and impoverished social categories. The process under discussion came into its own and blossomed fully in the middle Ganga valley during the Mauryan period. State society had thus arrived and the state was willing to make use of powerful religious systems such as Brahmanism, Buddhism, Jainism and so on to maintain itself and the social order. With these developments Gangetic northern India emerges into the full view of history.

2.5.2 The Tamil Country

The anthologies of early Tamil poems collectively known as Sangam literature provide a vivid account of the transition to a state society in the ancient Tamil country (Tamilakam) from an earlier tribal-pastoral stage. They indicate simultaneous existence of different ecological regions and suggest how different but interrelated lifeways ranging from food gathering, marginal agriculture, fishing and cattle-tending to intensive agriculture co-existed. In the fertile river valleys (*Marutam* regions) of the Kaveri, Periyar and Yaigai agricultural surpluses were produced and these precisely were the strongholds of the three ancient clan chiefs, the Chola, Chera and Pandya. Although the scene in the pre-Christian centuries was dominated by warrior chiefs, cattle-raids, war and booty, slowly people began to settle down as peasants and gradually a stratified society emerged with the peasants, bards, warriors and chieftains as the principal categories. The cult of war catapulted the warrior groups under their chiefs to a dominant position. The peasantry looking for protection and immunity from raids and plunder tended to be absorbed into a system in which a rudimentary state came into existence. The process of state formation was accelerated by the :

- Roman trade, in the early Christian centuries,
- the rise of towns, and
- the penetration of northern sanskritic (Aryan) culture along with the Brahmanas.

In the early centuries of the Christian era there was the growing importance of Roman trade; simultaneously there was a rise in inland trade within Tamilakam and between Tamilakam and the Deccan. Kerala was an integral part of Tamilakam during this early period. The numerous minor chieftaincies in hilly, marginal agricultural zones were increasingly brought within the spheres of the three kingdoms. Socially, the process is reflected in the formation of caste society with the peasants being reduced to the Sudra status. The basis of the emergence of the state was thus laid in early Tamil Nadu.

2.5.3 The Deccan : Andhra and Maharashtra

In Andhra and the Northern Deccan, the iron-using Megalithic communities which followed the Neolithic-Chalcolithic cultures provided the base for settled agriculture and helped in the transformation of these regions. High yielding paddy cultivation was resorted to in the occupied coastal tracts of Andhra during the 5th-3rd century B.C. The Megalithic burials have produced evidence for :

- rudimentary craft specialization,
- a rudimentary exchange network, which transported mineral resources to the Northern Deccan, and
- status differentiation.

There is evidence for a profusion of Black-and-Red ware sites suggesting a possible rise in population. The transformation of the Megalithic phase from around the third century B.C. marks the beginnings of change in a largely egalitarian, ranked society into a stratified society. By the second century B.C. there is evidence for metallic money, Roman trade and urbanization. Both inscriptions and archaeology reveal the existence of a number of towns in Andhra and Maharashtra during this period. By this time Buddhism had spread in Deccan and we see the growth of monasteries and Buddhist centres. In the meantime another kind of development had begun in the form of the historical spread of the Mauryan state, which accelerated the pace of these developments.

With the coming of the Mauryas the Megalithic culture gave way to early historical settlements. Many urban centres and monasteries in the Deccan, some of which emerged as nodal points, date to that period. It is precisely this interaction that led to the emergence of localities in the Deccan. Localities may be taken to approximate, to use a north Indian

parallel, the term *Janpada*. The emergence of localities seems to be a significant development by the time of the Satavahanas. They provided the basis for early historic state formation in the Deccan. From the 2nd century B.C. we see the gradual expansion of agricultural settlements and the integration of new communities. First, the monasteries and Buddhism and later the Brahmanas and Brahmanism helped the process of social integration. There developed a triangular relationship between the settled communities, the state and the monasteries and or the Brahmanas. The historical process advanced further under the Ikshvakus in coastal Andhra, the Kadambas in Karnataka and the Vakatakas in Maharashtra. By the middle of the first millennium A.D. the two regions registered their distinct individual presence.

2.5.4 Kalinga and Ancient Orissa

The land of Orissa, like the Deccan, experienced significant changes from around the 4th - 3rd century B.C. Between c.300 B.C. and c. 4th century A.D. the history of Orissa is one of internal transformation of the tribal society. The transition was partly autonomous and partly stimulated by contracts with the Sanskrit culture of the Gangetic plains, the beginnings of which can be traced back to the times of the Nandas and Mauryas. The subsequent period i.e. the 4th-9th centuries experienced the emergence of a series of sub-regional states in different pockets of the region. The specificities of the emerging pattern were well laid by the 10th century. The process, however, was not uniform nor evenly spread.

The littoral zone of the deltaic coast experienced transition to the historical stage earlier than the inland forest tracts and the rolling uplands, which have much in common with the adjoining Chhattisgarh and Bastar sub-regions. The tribal situation in central and western Orissa accounted for the arrested and uneven process of transformation in the region. The large concentration of tribals and the physiography of the land prevented a repetition of the Gangetic socio-economic pattern. Caste society within the *Varna* structure was late to emerge in Orissa and when it did there was a difference in the broad essentials. In terms of social structure Orissa presents an interesting case of regional variation.

2.5.5 The North-West

It must be clear that very little has been said so far about Sindh and Baluchistan in the North-West. This is mainly because of their peripheral location. For much of the early historical period they were cut off from the mainstream of cultural development by the great Indian Desert. This is not to argue that the area was culturally barren. In our period of study whenever anything of consequence happened there, it was mostly in relation to central Asia, Afghanistan or Persia (Iran). It was only from the Kushana period that these areas formed a part of a supra-regional political system which included a major part of northern India. However, in the North-West the Gandhara region was an exception.

As early as the 6th century B.C. Gandhara was listed among the sixteen *Mahajanapadas*. Bimbisara, the king of Magadha had diplomatic contacts with the king of Gandhara. Taxila, the capital of Gandhara was a centre of learning and trade. It had a wide economic reach. There is evidence for trade with Mathura, Central India and the Romans. Owing to her geographical location Gandhara continued to be a meeting place of various people and cultures. In the last quarter of the 6th century B.C. the region was politically a part of the Achaemenid (persian) empire. There is evidence for continuous urban life at Taxila from c.500 B.C. to c. A.D. 500. However, urban life was at its peak between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D. This is the period when the celebrated Gandhara school of art flowered. This school of art is generally described as Graeco-Buddhist in content because it is seen to be a product of interaction between Hellenistic art and Buddhism. However, increasingly it is being realised that the Gandhara school had a Bactrian substraction too. Therefore, the influence of the Bactrian school in the formation of the Gandhara school cannot be brushed aside. The point that we are trying to make is that:

- i) first, in the North-West, Gandhara provides a different picture of development which contrasts with Sindh and Baluchistan, and
- ii) secondly, in the early christian centuries the personality of the region was shaped by different influences because of her very geographical setting.

Check Your Progress 3

1 Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×)?

- i) The Gangetic basin is a homogeneous geographical base. ()
- ii) The need for coinage was generated through trade and commerce. ()

- iii) The Janapada provided the basis for state formation. ()
- iv) The Sangam literature throws no light on state formation in ancient Tamil country. ()
- v) The development of Gandhara region was shaped by different cultural influences. ()

2 Fill in the blanks :

- i) Agricultural surpluses helped in the (growth/decay) of towns.
- ii) The rise of (Janapadas/Mahajanpadas) led to the growth of Mahanagaras.
- iii) High yielding (wheat/paddy) cultivation was taken up in coastal Andhra during (5-3rd/1-2). B.C.
- iv) The (non-Tribal/Tribal) situation in Orissa arrested the transformation in the (sub-continent/region).

2.6 LET US SUM UP

A general survey of the problem of regions and regionalism in our history and the above examples trying to explain the process of the formation of regions very clearly show that the socio-cultural differentiation of regions is historically old. The emergence of natural physical regions as historical/cultural regions can be traced back to the formative period of Indian history. Subsequently these regions evolved their distinct socio-cultural ethos leading to the emergence of separate socio-political entities. Some regions surfaced earlier and faster than others owing to the early convergence of certain historical forces in them. Developments in other areas were triggered off by interaction with and cultural diffusion from these primary centres. This may partly explain the differential traits of the varied regions.

Regional variation expressed itself more conspicuously in many forms such as language, architecture, sculpture and the caste system in the Gupta and post-Gupta centuries. Almost all the regional language evolved during the said period. Simultaneously region-specific caste structures emerged. Such differences existed not only between regions but also within regions. Although regions tend to be somewhat homogeneous units, the persistence of sub-regions within regions cannot be ignored either. Already we have seen that Gangetic northern India is not all one homogeneous region. The ecological variations within ancient Tamilakam (Tamil Nadu) also need to be remembered. The same holds true for Andhra, Orissa, Punjab and Gujarat. The sub-regions had their ancient names too. However, the changing political patterns and the configurations of sub-regions were responsible for grafting new inclusive broad-based names on areas that earlier had different names. Regions as territorial units emerge through historical process and to understand Indian history one has to understand their characteristics and the process of their formation.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Autochthonous: Indigenous, native, aboriginal

Colonized: Settle in a colony

Concomitant: Along with

Dynamics: Pattern of Change development and growth in any field

Epicentre: Centre of origin of earthquake

Ethos: Character, disposition of a community or culture

Formative: Giving shape, moulding

Social Stratification: Division of Society according to rank caste and strata

Static: Lacking vitality

2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 i) $\times$ ii) $\checkmark$ iii) $\times$ iv) $\checkmark$ v) $\times$
2 Hint: OCP, PGW and give their timing. See Sub-sec 2.2.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Your answer should include the development of strong regional personalities; strength of regional personalities; strength of regional forces etc. See Section 2.3.
2 See Sub. sec 2.3.1
3 i) independent ii) Co-existed iii) different iv) higher, history

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 i) $\times$ ii) $\checkmark$ iii) $\checkmark$ iv) $\times$ v) $\checkmark$
2 i) growth ii) Mahajanpadas iii) paddy, 5-3rd iv) tribal, region.

UNIT 3 HUNTER-GATHERERS: ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Palaeolithic Stage
 - 3.2.1 Palaeolithic Tools
 - 3.2.2 Palaeolithic Sites
 - 3.2.3 Subsistence Pattern
- 3.3 Mesolithic Stage
 - 3.3.1 Mesolithic Tools
 - 3.3.2 Mesolithic Sites
 - 3.3.3 Subsistence Pattern
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Key Words
- 3.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

3.0 OBJECTIVES

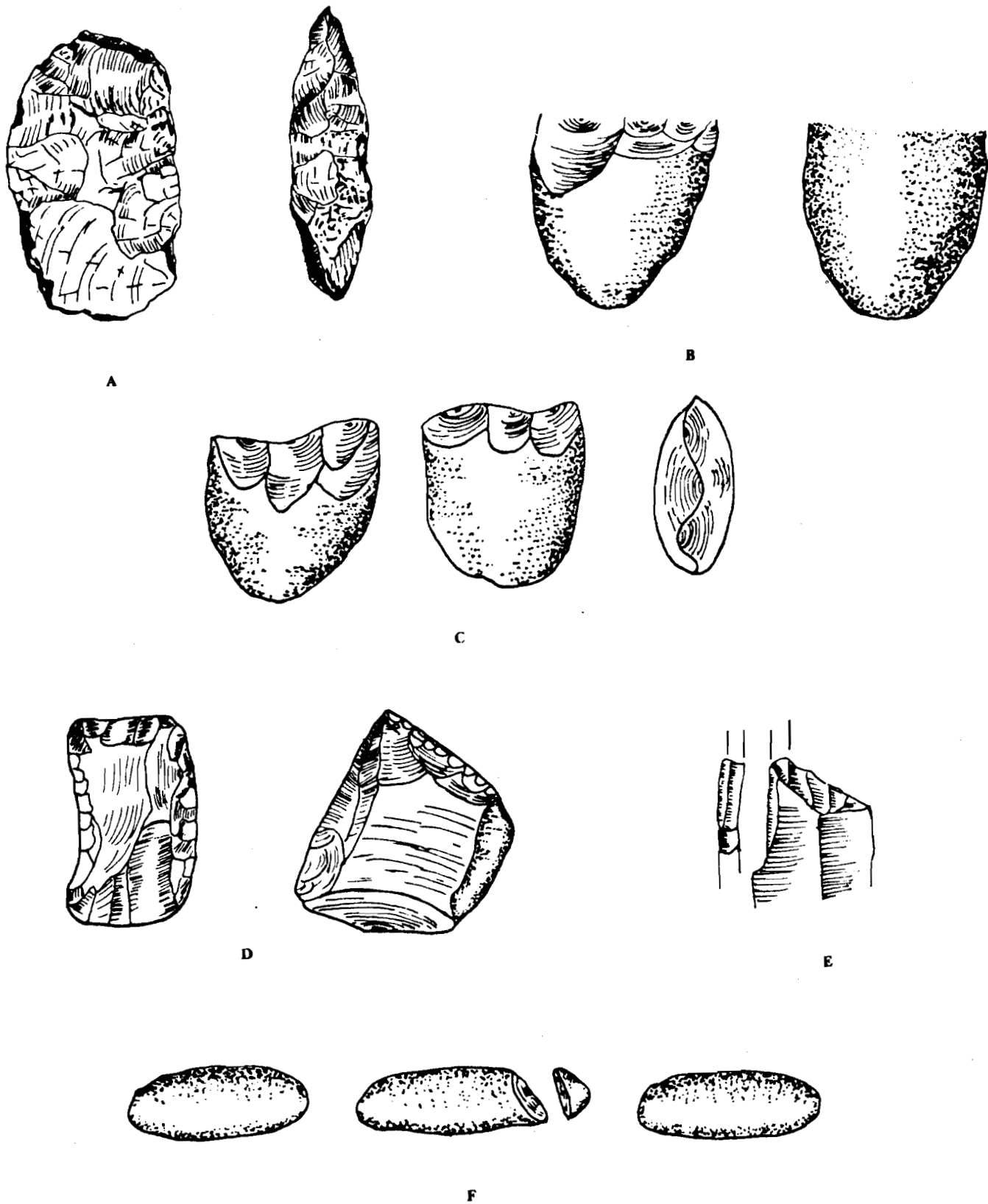
After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn :

- the various ways to study the pre-historic hunters-gatherers.
- about the archaeological evidences which enable us to reconstruct their history.
- about their subsistence pattern,
- about the kinds of tools they used, and to what extent pre-historic art helps us in knowing about their organisation.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It may seem unbelievable to us, living in the 20th century, but it is nevertheless true that human societies during more than 99% of their existence on the earth have lived as hunters/gatherers. This means that before human beings started producing food about 10,000 years ago, they lived off the resources of nature. This they did by gathering various edible items like roots, fruits, sodd, honey and so on which nature had to offer and by killing animals, birds and fish available in the surroundings in which they lived. The total dependence of human being on nature or their environment during the major part of human existence has many implications. It means that the way they acquired their food influenced the character of their relationship with Nature and also how they viewed Nature. Second, the hunters/gatherers existed in groups was also related to the mode of thus acquiring food. What may be noted is that the formation of groups among hunters/gatherers was much more flexible than in other societies.

Considering the very, very long span of time for which human societies have been in the hunting/gathering stage, it is important that we learn about this stage of human history. There are different areas in the world where human beings still live as hunters/gatherers. It is thus necessary that we learn something about their cultures in addition to learning about culture changes in human history. How do we learn about hunters/gatherers? We get considerable amount of information about different aspects of the hunters/gatherers way of life, their social organization and their environment from the works of ethnographers/anthropologists who study living human communities. Their works provide us with useful insights into the ways and conditions of life of hunting/gathering communities of the past. However, for the past communities we depend primarily on the works of those archaeologists and other scientists who have specialised in discovering studying and analysing the tools which these communities



(A) Clevers (B) Choppers (C) Chopping tools (D) Side scrappers (E) Burin (F) Fakes

made, the remains of animals which they killed and ate and the kind of environment in which they lived. This method which involves coming together of many academic disciplines takes into consideration many categories of evidence including the study of all animals, plants and other organic remains when archaeologists associate them with human communities of the hunting/gathering stage, and this gives an insight into the character of the immediate physical environment of the early man and the way it was utilised.

Since the tools made by the hunters/gatherers have survived in the form of stone tools, archaeologists use different terms like paleoliths, mesoliths to classify tools of different types and period. The stones which may not be used for mixing them and the techniques employed in giving them shape are also studied in detail by archaeologists. The faunal study or the study of animal remains provides a framework which can serve as a reference point for measuring variations in the pattern of pre-historic faunal exploitation. The rock carvings and paintings also give us an idea about the economy and society of the pre-historic people.

3.2 PALAEOLITHIC STAGE

Palaeolithic Culture developed in the Pleistocene period. The Pleistocene period (about 2 million years ago) is the geological period referring to the last or the Great Ice Age. It was the period when ice covered the earth's surface. In India, there has been considerable discussion among archaeologists regarding the terms denoting stone tools of the palaeolithic phase :

- One group of scholars wanted to introduce the term 'Upper Palaeolithic' for denoting the phase characterised by tools like blade and burin;
- The other group of scholars considered the term 'Upper Palaeolithic' specific to European Palaeolithic culture. Now the term Upper Palaeolithic has been widely accepted in the Indian context.

3.2.1 Palaeolithic Tools

Palaeolithic Culture has been divided into three phases on the basis of the nature of stone tools made by human beings as well as due to the changes in the climate and environment.

- The tools of the lower Palaeolithic phase include mainly handaxes, cleavers, choppers and chopping tools,
- the middle Palaeolithic industries are based upon flakes, and
- the Upper Palaeolithic is characterised by burins and scrapers

Let us discuss in detail some of the tools of this period and to what use were they put to.

- **Handaxe** : Its butt end is broader and the working end is narrower. It might have been used for cutting and digging purposes.
- **Cleaver** : This has a biface edge and is more or less transversal. It was used for clearing and splitting objects such as trunks of trees, choppers
- **Chopper** : A massive core tool in which the working edge is prepared by unifacial flaking and used for chopping purposes.
- **Chopping Tool** : It is again a massive core tool like Chopper but the working edge is bifacially prepared by alternate flaking. Used for similar purpose as the chopper, it was more effective due to its edge being sharper.
- **Flake** : A desired crude shape tool produced by applying force on the stone. The flake carries positive bulb of percussion on its surface and the core has a corresponding negative bulb of percussion. The point at which the hammerstone strikes is called the point of percussion and on the flake struck off there is round, slightly convex shape around this point called the positive bulb of percussion. On the core there is corresponding concave bulb called the negative bulb of percussion. There are many Flaking Techniques like Free Flaking Technique, Step Flaking Technique, Block on Block Technique, Bipolar Technique etc.
- **Side Scraper** : Side Scraper is made of a flake or blade with continuous retouch along a border. It might have been used for scraping barks of trees and animal skins.
- **Burin** : It is like flake or blade and the working border is produced by the meeting of two planes. The burins working border does not exceed 2-3 cm. in length. It was used for engraving on soft stones, bones or walls of rock shelters and cores.

3.2.2 Palaeolithic Sites

Let us now see in which regions of India archaeologists have found these tools fashioned by the hunters/gatherers. The distribution of their tools will tell us not only about the areas in which the hunter/gatherers lived and moved but also about their environment.

Let us start from the extreme north:

- i) The Kashmir Valley is surrounded by Pir Panjal Hills on the South-West and the Himalayas on the north-east. A handaxe was discovered near Pahalgam in Kashmir on the River Lidder. However, Palaeolithic tools are not found in large number in Kashmir because Kashmir was intensely cold during the glacial times. The Potwar region (present day West Punjab & Pakistan) lies between Pir Panjal and the Salt Range. This area was experiencing tectonic movement and rivers Indus and Sohan originated in this process. The Sohan Valley yielded handaxes and choppers and the important sites which have yielded such tools are Adial, Balwal and Chauntra. The banks of rivers Beas, Bangange and Sirsa have also yielded Palaeolithic tools.
- ii) The Luni river (Rajasthan) complex has many palaeolithic sites. The river Luni has its source in the Aravalis. Chittorgarh (Gambhirs basin), Kota (Chambal basin), and Negarai (Berach basin) have yielded Palaeolithic tools. The Wagaon and Kadamali rivers in Mewar are rich in Middle Palaeolithic sites. A variety of scrapers, borers and points have been discovered in this area.
- iii) The rivers Sabarmati, Mahi and their tributaries (Gujarat) have yielded many Palaeolithic artefacts. Sabarmati rises in the Aravalis and flows into the Gulf of Cambay. Middle Palaeolithic artefacts have been reported from Bhandarpur near Orsang Valley. The river Bhader in Saurashtra is rich in Palaeolithic assemblage and handaxes, cleavers, chopping tools, points, borers and scrapers have been reported from its banks. The Kutch area has produced many Palaeolithic tools like cleavers, handaxes and choppers.
- iv) The Narbada river rises in the Maikal range and flows into the Gulf of Cambay. The Narbada terraces are rich in Palaeolithic sites. Many handaxes and cleavers have been reported. Bhimbetka (near Bhopal) located in the Vindhyan range is a site in which tools representing the Acheulian tradition were replaced at a later stage by the Middle Palaeolithic Culture.
- v) The rivers—Tapti, Godavari, Bhima and Krishna have yielded a large number of Palaeolithic sites. The distribution of Palaeolithic sites is linked up with ecological variation like erosional feature, nature of soils, etc. The Tapti trough has deep regur (black soil), and the rest of the area is covered mostly by medium regur. There is scarcity of Palaeolithic sites in the upper reaches of Bhima and Krishna. From Chirki near Nevasa in Maharashtra Palaeolithic tools like handaxes, chopper, cleavers, scrapers and borers have been reported. The other important Palaeolithic sites are Koregaon, Chandoli and Shikarpur in Maharashtra.
- vi) In eastern India, the river Raro (Singbhum, Bihar) is rich in Palaeolithic tools like handaxes, bifacial chopping tools and flakes. From Singbhum many Palaeolithic sites have been reported and the main artefacts are handaxes and choppers. Palaeolithic tools have also been reported from the valleys of the Damodar and the Suvarnarekha. and the distribution pattern of the palaeolithic culture here is again conditioned by topographical features.
The Baitarani, Brahmani and Mahanadi rivers form the deltaic region of Orissa and some palaeolithic tools have been found in this area.
The Buharbalang Valley in Mayurbhang in Orissa has many Early and Middle Palaeolithic tools like handaxes, scrapers, points, flakes, etc.
- vii) From Malprabha, Ghatprabha and the affluents of the Krishna a number of Palaeolithic sites have been reported. In Ghatprabha basin in Karnataka Acheulian handaxes have been found in large numbers. Anagawadi and Bagalkot are two most important sites on the Ghatprabha where both Early and Middle Palaeolithic tools have been found.
The rivers Palar, Penniyar and Kaveri in Tamil Nadu are rich in Palaeolithic tools. Attirampakkam and Gudiyam (in Tamil Nadu) have yielded both Early and Middle Palaeolithic artefacts like handaxes, flakes, blades, scrapers, etc.

3.2.3 Subsistence Pattern

There is a rich assemblage of animals both of indigenous and foreign origin. Primates, many giraffe-like forms, musk-deer, goats, buffaloes, bovids and pigs seem to be of indigenous origin. The camel and the horse had North-American connection. Hippopotamus and elephants migrated to India from Central Africa. The migratory routes lay east and west of the

Himalayas. However, the wave of migration of most of the immigrant animals was along the north-west borders. There was great deal of interaction between India and Africa.

As regards the relationship between Palaeolithic human beings and their resources, the faunal remains give us some idea about their subsistence pattern. These remains suggest that the people were primarily in a hunting and gathering stage. It is likely that the balance between number of human population and the animal population of the area in which they lived and moved to ensure food supply would have been maintained. The people would have made extensive use of faunal and floral resources in their immediate vicinity. Hunting practices were concentrated on large and middle sized mammals especially ungulates (a type of animal). At the same time deer, rhino, and elephant seem to have been hunted. There is no evidence of selective hunting in this period. In some assemblages few species dominate; it is so because of their abundance in the area and also because they were easy to hunt. It seems that the subsistence patterns of hunter-gatherers were geared to a dry-season/wet-season cycle of exploitation of plant and animal foods. It is likely that the palaeolithic people subsisted on such animals as ox, bison, nilgai, chinkara, gazelle, black buck antelope, sambar, spotted deer wild boar, a variety of birds, and tortoises and fishes and on honey and plant foods like fruits roots, seeds and leaves.

It is argued that the items which were gathered and constituted their diet are generally far more important than the animals which are hunted in the context of modern surviving hunter-gatherers. It has been also observed that the debris from the gathered part of the diet normally survive far less than the debris from the hunted part. It is difficult to work out on this basis the diet pattern of Palaeolithic people because we do not have much evidence of people and plant relationship for the past as we have for the present-day hunters/gatherers. It is likely that Palaeolithic people would have been taking animal diet along with products of wild plants.

Rock paintings and carvings also give us an insight into the subsistence pattern and social life of the Palaeolithic people. The earliest paintings belong to Upper Palaeolithic age. Bhimbetka located on the Vindhyan range, is well known for continuous succession of paintings of different periods. Period-I belongs to Upper Palaeolithic stage and paintings are done in green and dark red colours. The paintings are predominantly of bison, elephants, tigers, rhinos and boars. They are usually large, some measuring two-three metres in length. There is need to work out the frequency of the different types of animals to have more precise idea about the hunting life of Palaeolithic people. But hunting is reflected as the main subsistence pursuit in the carvings and paintings. It is sometimes possible to distinguish between men and women on the basis of anatomical features. These paintings also reflected that palaeolithic people lived in small band (small groups) societies whose subsistence economy was based on exploitation of resources in the form of both animal and plant products.

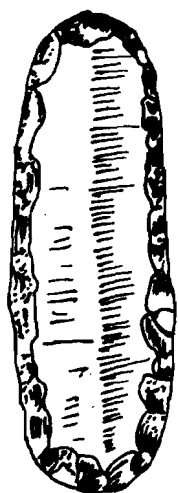
Check Your Progress 1

Note : Read the following questions carefully and mark the right and most appropriate answers.

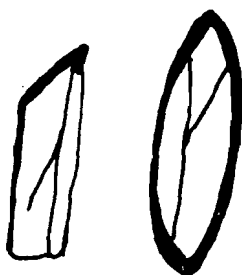
- 1 Which period of Social evolution represents the hunting-gathering stage :
 - a) Palaeolithic Age
 - b) Mesolithic Age
 - c) Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Age
 - d) Neolithic Age
- 2 How are pre-historic hunter-gatherer societies studied?
 - a) With the help of literary sources.
 - b) With the help of numismatic sources.
 - c) With the help of epigraphic sources.
 - d) With the help of archaeological remains
- 3 Pleistocene Period was :
 - a) Very cold
 - b) Very warm
 - c) Temperature was mild
 - d) Very dry
- 4 Palaeolithic Culture has been divided into three phases on the basis of :
 - a) Change in the climate
 - b) The nature of stone tools.
 - c) Faunal remains
 - d) Nature of stone tools and change in climate and faunal remains.

5 Palaeolithic economy was based on :

- a) Food Production
- b) Hunting
- c) Gathering of products of wild plants
- d) Hunting of animals and gathering of products of wild plants



2. Retouched Blade



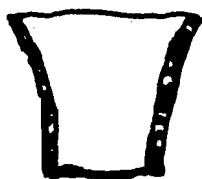
3. Points



4. Triangle



5. Lunates



6. Trapeze

3.3 MESOLITHIC STAGE

The Mesolithic Age began around 8000 BC. It was the transitional phase between the Palaeolithic Age and the Neolithic Age. There was rise in temperature and the climate became warm and dry. The climatic changes affected human life and brought about changes in fauna and flora. The technology of producing tools also underwent change and the small stone tools were used. Man was predominantly in hunting/gathering stage but there was shift in the pattern of hunting from big game to small game hunting and to fishing and fowling. These material and ecological changes are also reflected in rock paintings. Let us examine some of the tools used during this period.

3.3.1 Mesolithic Tools

The Mesolithic tools are microliths or small stone tools. Microliths are very small in size and their length ranges from 1 to 8 cm. Some microliths have even geometric forms. Blade, core, point, triangle, lunate and trapeze are the main types of Mesolithic tools. Besides these, Palaeolithic tools like scraper, burin and even choppers also continue during the Mesolithic Age:

- i) **Blade**: Blade is a specialized flake with parallel to sub-parallel to lateral edge, its length is equal to at least twice its width. It might have been used for cutting purposes. The techniques of Mesolithic blade production is called fluting. Here the pressure is delivered on the core from the edge of the striking platform. We also find some retouched blades which are broad, thick and long. The retouching process sharpens the blade and we find blades with retouching along one or two borders or even at two ends. These blades are more sharp and effective than ordinary blades.
- ii) **Core**: Core is usually cylindrical in shape with fluting marks along its length and a flat striking platform at the distal horizontal end.
- iii) **Point**: Point is a broken blade in a triangular form. It is retouched along one or both the sloping borders and the border can be rectilinear or curvilinear. The points were used as arrowheads and spearheads.
- iv) **Triangle**: It has usually one border and the base, and the border is retouched. These were used for cutting purposes or as arrowheads.
- v) **Lunate**: Lunate is like a blade and one of the borders is prepared by semi-circular retouching. It looks like a segment of a circle. It could be used to obtain concave cutting edge or two of these could be halved back to back to form an arrowhead.
- vi) **Trapeze**: Trapeze looks like blade and usually more than one border is retouched. Some trapezes have retouches on three borders. Trapezes could have been used as arrowheads.

3.3.2 Mesolithic Sites

Let us discuss some of the prominent Mesolithic sites in India :

- i) The Pachpadra basin and the Sojat area (Rajasthan) are rich in microliths. The significant habitation site discovered is Tilwara. Tilwara has two cultural phases, Phase-I is Mesolithic and is characterized by the presence of microliths. In Phase-II wheel made pottery and pieces of iron are found together with microliths. Bagor (Rajasthan) on the river Kothari is the largest Mesolithic site in India and has been horizontally excavated. Bagor has three cultural phases. On the basis of radio-carbon dating phase I or the earliest phase of culture has been placed between 5000-2000 B.C.
- ii) The rivers Tapti, Narmada, Mahi and Sabarmati (Gujarat) has also yielded many Mesolithic sites. Sites like Akhaj, Valasana, Hirpur and Langhnaj are situated east of the river Sabarmati. Langhnaj has been extensively studied and it has revealed three cultural phases. Phase i has produced microliths, burials and animal bones. The microliths are mostly blades, triangles, crescents, scrapers and burins.
- iii) The Vindhya and Satpura are rich in Mesolithic sites. In Allahabad-Pratapgarh area, Sarai Nahar Rai (Uttar Pradesh) is an extensively studied site. Morhana Pahar (Uttar

Pradesh) and Lekhahia (Uttar Pradesh) are two significant Mesolithic sites in Kaimur range. Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh) has yielded many microliths. Bhimbetka has a favourable ecological set up. Adamgarh in Hosangabad and lying to the south of Bhimbetka is another significant Mesolithic site.

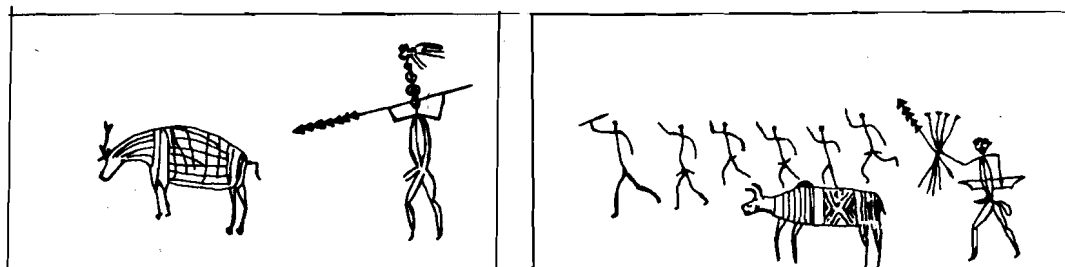
- iv) Microliths have been reported from coastal Konkan and the inland plateau. Sites like Kasushol, Janyire, Babhalgo and Jalgarh have been reported from Konkan. The Deccan basaltic plateau has many Mesolithic sites and microliths have been reported from Dhulia district and Poona district.
 - v) The Chhota Nagpur plateau, the coastal plains of Orissa, the Bengal delta, the Brahmaputra valley and the Shillong plateau have yielded microliths. Pre-Neolithic and Neolithic associated microliths have been reported from Chhota Nagpur plateau. Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Sundergarh in Orissa have microlithic assemblage. Kuchai in Orissa is an excavated microlithic site. Birbhanpur located on the River Damodar in West Bengal is another excavated microlithic site. Sebalgiri-2 in Garo hills of Meghalaya has yielded pre-Neolithic microliths.
 - vi) The Krishna and Bhima rivers have produced many microliths. The microliths in many cases survive to the phase of Neolithic Cultures. Sangankallu situated on the western fringe of the Karnataka plateau has produced cores, flakes, points and crescents. The Godavari delta is rich in microliths. Here the microliths are associated with the Neolithic Culture. The Kurnool area has many microliths. Microliths have also been reported from Renigunta, in Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh.
- Since the Mesolithic age covers a long span of time and there are many mesolithic sites in India, an attempt has been made to classify different sites chronologically and on the basis of material remains. Some sites are real Mesolithic sites because of the abundance of microliths and chronological sequence and some sites are chronologically of later time and reflect the influence of Mesolithic culture and these sites fall in the category of the sites of Mesolithic tradition.

Sites like Bagor, Sarai-Nahar-Rai, Mahadaha and Adamgarh are truly Mesolithic sites because of their early dates and associated material Culture.

3.3.3 Subsistence Pattern

The early Mesolithic sites have yielded the faunal remains of cattle, sheep, goat, buffalo, pig, dog, boar, bison, elephant, hippo, jackal, wolf, cheetah, sambal, barasingha, black-buck, chinkara, hog deer, hare, porcupine, mongoose, lizard, tortoise and fish. Many of these species continued during the range of Mesolithic tradition. However, wild sheep, wild goat, ass, elephant, bison, fox, hippo, sambar, chinkara, hare, porcupine, lizard, rat, fowl and tortoise are absent at the sites falling in the category of Mesolithic tradition. But wild buffalo, camel, wolf, rhinoceros and nilgai are present in the sites of Mesolithic tradition but these species are absent in the early Mesolithic period. The appearance and disappearance of the animals has to be understood in the context of changing climatic and environmental conditions.

The diet of the people during Mesolithic Age included both meat and vegetal food. The remains of fish, tortoise, hare, mongoose, porcupine, deer and nilgai have been found from different Mesolithic sites like Langhanaj and Tilwara and it seems these were consumed as food. Besides hunting and fishing, the Mesolithic people also collected wild roots, tubers, fruits, honey etc. and these constituted important elements in the overall dietary pattern. The plant food seems to have been more easily available than the hunted animal food. Some areas seem to have been rich in grass, edible roots, seeds, nuts and fruits, and people would have used them as food resources. It is argued in the context of surviving hunter-gatherers that the major portion of the food comes from plant sources supplemented by hunting. It is difficult to establish co-relation between the animal meat and vegetal food in the context of Mesolithic age because the plant remains are perishable in nature. It can be suggested that hunting provided significant portion of the food resource.



7. Mesolithic Rock Paintings (Bhimbetka)

The paintings and engravings found at the rock shelters which the Mesolithic people used give us considerable idea about the social life and economic activities of Mesolithic people. Sites like Bhimbetka, Adamgarh, Pratapgarh and Mirzapur are rich in Mesolithic art and paintings. Hunting, food-gathering, fishing and other human activities are reflected in these paintings and engravings. Bhimbetka is extremely rich in paintings. Many animals like, boar, buffalo, monkey and nilgai are frequently depicted. The paintings and engravings depict activities like sexual union, child birth, rearing of child, and burial ceremony. All these indicate that during the Mesolithic period, social organization had become more stable than in palaeolithic times. It seems that the religious beliefs of the Mesolithic people are conditioned by ecological and material conditions.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 The Mesolithic tools are primarily:
 - a) Handaxe and cleaver
 - b) Cleaver, Chopper and Chopping tools
 - c) Blade, Core, Point, and Lunate
 - d) Chopping tool and flake.
- 2 Mesolithic sites have been reported from:
 - a) The river Kothari
 - b) The river Tapti
 - c) Godavari delta
 - d) The rivers Kothari, Tapti and Godavari delta.
- 3 Which one of the following statements is most appropriate?
 - a) The subsistence pattern of Mesolithic people was based on hunting of animals.
 - b) gathering of wild fruits and seeds
 - c) hunting of animals and gathering of wild fruits.
 - d) surplus food production.
- 4 Write ten lines. What do the Mesolithic tools and paintings suggest in terms of subsistence pattern and social organisation?

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3.4 LET US SUM UP

The Pre-historic societies of hunter-gatherers are studied on the basis of archaeological remains with the help of anthropological theories. The Palaeolithic and Mesolithic ages represent the hunting-gathering stage of social evolution. The Palaeolithic Culture has three phases in terms of the nature of stone tools and changes in climate. The handaxes, cleavers, choppers and chopping tools are predominantly Early Palaeolithic artefacts. The Middle Palaeolithic tools are mainly flakes. The Upper Palaeolithic Culture is characterized by burins and scrapers. The Mesolithic Age started around 8000 B.C. and the age is associated with changes in climatic conditions. There was further technological development reflected in the production of microliths and small stone tools. The Mesolithic tools are mainly the blade, core, point, triangle and lunate.

Faunal remains give us considerable idea about the subsistence pattern of palaeolithic and Mesolithic people. During the palaeolithic age people were primarily in the hunting and

gathering stage. People seem to have hunted large and middle size mammals such as elephant, ox, nilgai, deer, wild bear and a variety of birds. At the same time they also exploited the plant foods like fruits, seeds etc. The hunting-gathering pattern continued during the Mesolithic age. However, some animals like wild goat, fox etc. appeared during this time. From the palaeolithic age to Mesolithic Age, there seems to have been a shift from big animal hunting to small animal hunting and fishing. The pre-historic paintings give us insight into the economic social and cultural life of the people.

3.5 KEY WORDS

Acheulian : It is used for describing a particular type of Handaxe. Such handaxes were first found in France in the deposits of the early part of glaciation.

Artefact : Any object that has been made, modified or used by human beings. It may range from a coarse stone used in the manufacture of flint to anything of high technical accomplishment in any material.

Assemblage : A group of objects of different types found in close association with each other. Where the assemblage is frequently repeated, and covers reasonably full range of human activity it is described as a Culture.

Calibration : In the context of radiocarbon dating, this term refers to the adjustment of dates in radiocarbon years by means of dendrochronological date so that a date in real, i.e. calendar years is achieved. Un-calibrated dates are raw dates in radiocarbon years, and this is the way that most dates from this technique are published.

Concave : Curving inwards and thinner at the centre than at the edges.

Convex : Curving outwards and thicker at the centre than the edges.

Ethnography : The subject that deals with the descriptive recording of cultures.

Ecology : Interrelationship between animal life and plant life.

Epigraphy : It is the study of inscriptions.

Flora : The plant life of an area.

Fauna : It stands for animal life.

Geology : The subject that deals with the composition, structure, and history of the earth.

Glaciation : A period of cold climate during which the area covered by the ice caps increased. Several glaciations may go to make up an 'Ice Age'

Mammal : The animal that feed their young with milk from the breast.

Numismatics : It is the study of coins.

Pleistocene : The geological period corresponding with the last of Great Ice Age. The onset of the Pleistocene is marked by an increasingly cold climate.

Pollen analysis : This technique is used in establishing relative chronology. It is the analysis of the pollens of flowers.

Primate : Age of the highest order of mammals (including human beings, apes, monkeys and lemur)

Rectangle : A quadri lateral with right angles between all four sides.

Rectilinear : Consisting of straight line.

Radiocarbon : One of the best known chronometric dating techniques which can be used for dating of most organic material up to 70,000 years old. Plants and other living organs consume carbon from the atmosphere during this life time. This carbon also includes carbon 14 (14c) which is a radioactive element. After the death of plants and the living organs the accumulated 14c starts decaying and by measuring its present concentration we can determine the age of the organisms which became extinct a long time ago.

Transverse : Cross-wise, in a direction at right angles to the length of the body.

Terrace : A platform of land created by the river. It is formed beside the river.

3.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) (c) 2) (d) 3) (a) 4) (d) 5) (d)

Check Your Progress 2

1) (c) 2) (d) 3) (c)

- 4 You have to use imagination for your answer like whatever the human beings painted reflects their life pattern and surroundings. For example a painting which shows a mammal hunted by human beings indicates formation of small social groups to carry the hunt; it also reflects their food habits as to what animals they ate and the type of tools they used for hunting, etc. See Sub-sec. 3.

UNIT 4 ORIGIN OF AGRICULTURE AND DOMESTICATION OF ANIMALS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Neolithic Stage of Culture
- 4.3 The Earliest Farmers
 - 4.3.1 Nile Valley
 - 4.3.2 Early Farmers of Western Asia
- 4.4 Early Farmers of the Indian Sub-Continent
 - 4.4.1 North Western Region
 - 4.4.2 Neolithic Culture of Kashmir Valley
 - 4.4.3 Early Farmers of the Belan Valley
 - 4.4.4 Neolithic Culture of Bihar/Mid Ganga Valley
 - 4.4.5 Early Farmers of Eastern India
 - 4.4.6 Early Farmers of South India
 - 4.4.7 Neolithic Culture of Upper, Central and Western Deccan
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit deals with the origins of agriculture and beginnings of domestication of animals before the stage when metals came to be used. Cultivation of cereals and developments in agriculture transformed the nomadic hunter-gatherer into a sedentary farmer. This led to the beginning of village settlements and manufacturing of new types of tools. This stage of human development is referred to as the Neolithic stage. After studying this Unit, you will be able to learn about:

- the characteristic features of the Neolithic stage of culture,
- the archaeological evidence in the forms of new types of stone tools, cultivated plants etc., which demonstrates the beginning of cultivation,
- the patterns of agriculture in West Asia and the Indian sub-continent, and
- the various crops which were cultivated in different regions of the Indian sub-continent.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier Unit you have seen that human communities in general survived for the longest span of their existence as hunters/gatherers. This stage of their existence is revealed by their stone tools classified by archaeologists as:

- i) Palaeolithic, and
- ii) Mesolithic

as also by the remains of animals hunted and eaten by them.

Human communities entered a new stage of culture when, instead of depending entirely on the resources of nature for survival, they started producing their own food by cultivating cereals like barley, wheat and rice and started domesticating some species of animals—both for supplies of milk and meat as well as for harnessing their labour for various purposes. Beginnings of this stage of human culture are revealed by new type of stone tools which are called Neolithic tools or tools of the New Stone Age. Neolithic tools and various aspects of human life associated with the stage when these tools were produced constitute the various

elements of the stage of the Culture in which Neolithic communities lived. The characteristics and spread of Neolithic culture in the Nile Valley and West Asia have been dealt with briefly in this Unit as a background to the study of the Neolithic stage in the Indian sub-continent.

4.2 NEOLITHIC STAGE OF CULTURE

Domestication of plants and animals has been considered as one of the main characteristic features of the Neolithic stage of culture. The term Neolithic was coined by Sir John Lubbock in his book *Prehistoric Times* (first published in 1865). He used this term to denote an Age in which the stone implements were more skillfully made, more varied in form and often polished. Later on V. Gordon Childe defined the Neolithic-Chalcolithic culture as a self-sufficient food producing economy; and Miles Burkitt stressed that the following characteristic traits should be considered to represent the Neolithic Culture:

- Practice of agriculture
- Domestication of animals
- Grinding and polishing of stone tools, and also
- The manufacture of pottery.

The concept of what is Neolithic has been undergoing some change in recent years. A recent study mentions that the term Neolithic should represent a culture of the pre-metal stage where the inhabitants had assured supply of food by cultivation of cereals and domestication of animals and led a sedentary life. However, the Ground stone tools remain the most essential characteristics of a Neolithic culture.

Domestication of plants and animals led to:

- the emergence of village communities based on sedentary life,
- the beginnings of agriculture technology, and
- greater control over nature by exploitation of natural resources.

However, before discussing the evidences and specificities of Neolithic stage of culture in our own sub-continent we shall briefly discuss the beginning of the process of domestication of animals and plants by human beings in areas outside India and in the Indian sub-continent. Chart 1 describes the approximate time period in which domestication of plants and animals seems to have began.

Chart-1

Region	Age	Cultivation of
Nile Valley	Approximately 12,500 B.C.	Wheat and Barley
Western Asia	8500 BC onward	-do-
Baluchistan	From 6000 B.C.	-do-
Belan Valley in Uttar Pradesh	5440-4530 B.C.	Rice
South India	2500-1500 B.C.	Ragi

4.3 THE EARLIEST FARMERS

Till recently it was believed that the beginning of domestication of plants and animals took place in Western Asia and from there it spread to various other regions of the world through diffusion. But now, on the basis of the archaeological evidences recently obtained from the Nile Valley in Egypt and other regions, such views may have to be modified.

4.3.1 Nile Valley

The new evidence which has been brought to light regarding the earliest cultivation of wheat and barley comes from excavations conducted at:

- Wadi Kubbania (located a short distance north of Aswan in South Egypt),

- Wadi Tuska (near Abu Simbel now under water),
- Kom Umbo (to the north of Aswan about 60 Km from the Kubbania sites), and
- a group of sites near Esna.

What is significant about this evidence is that they are all upper Palaeolithic sites located in the Nile Valley and are not Neolithic sites.

These sites are dated between 14500-13000 years before present by archaeologists.

The evidence obtained from the Nile Valley raises some important issues :

- As there is no evidence of animals, domestication at the Egyptian sites it may be concluded that the cultivation of cereals preceded the domestication of animals in this region. Domestication of plants and domestication of animals are thus not necessarily inter-related.
- As cultivation of cereals is associated with late palaeolithic tools it may be concluded that food production in some cases may have preceded the Neolithic culture with which ground stone tools are associated.
- Cultivation of cereals gave rise to Neolithic revolution and preceded it.
- As the Kubbania sites lie far outside the known range of both wild wheat and wild barley, it may be concluded that food production did not necessarily originate in areas where the plants existed in wild forms.
- Domestication of plants did not originate in Western Asia as believed earlier.

4.3.2 Early Farmers of Western Asia

Let us now consider the process of evolution in Western Asia. The region embraces Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, the Caspian basin and the adjoining regions of Iran. These are the modern countries where archaeologists have identified the earliest farming village settlements. It is now well-known that farming began in Palestine, Syria and Turkey in the ninth-eighth millennium B.C. Significantly, the hunter-gatherers of this region gave up their movements and began a sedentary life first in some areas depending upon the exploitation of wild resources. On sites such as Mureybat, north of Abu Hureyra on the Euphrates in North Syria and Suberde in Southern Turkey on the same river, permanent settlements could flourish entirely on hunting and gathering. Transition to farming was a slow process but from about the ninth millennium B.C. evidence is found that settled communities were emerging with farming as the essential basis of the pattern of their settled life. There are a number of sites which demonstrate settled communities of farmers in West Asia:

- i) Between 8500-7500 B.C. Jericho in Palestine became a large village where agriculture is evidenced but there is no evidence of animal domestication (which developed later). During excavations it was found in the later levels that Jericho was surrounded by a two metre wide stone wall with rounded towers. This is one of the earliest instances of fortification in the world.
- ii) Catal Huyuk in Southern Turkey was a large village. Here wheat, barley and peas were grown. Animals like cattle, sheep and goat were domesticated. The mud houses which were supposed to be entered through the roof, consisted of two rooms and were built back to back. The Walls of the houses were found painted with leopards, erupting volcano and vultures devouring human corpses without heads. Evidence of material culture at this place has been found in the forms of pottery, stone axes, stone ornaments, bone tools, wooden bowls and basketry.
- iii) In Iraq at Jarmo there is also evidence of permanently established farming villages (6500-5800 B.C.) with about 20 to 30 mud houses, each with a courtyard and several rooms associated with ground stone axes, querns, pottery, etc. The people grew wheat and barley and domesticated sheep and goat.
- iv) In Iran farming began in the region of Khuzistan during eight millennium B.C., almost the same time as in Palestine and Anatolia. At Ali Kosh in South Iran (from about 7,500 B.C.) we have the evidence of a winter camp of people who were cultivating wheat and barley. They were also domesticating sheep. It appears that in this region herding and agriculture were inter-related.

In Western Asia crop cultivation and domestication of animals are inter-related at certain sites whereas in some regions agriculture came before the domestication of animals.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Discuss in about 10 lines the main characteristics of Neolithic stage of culture.

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- 2 Discuss some of the main issues relating to early farming which excavation in the Nile Valley have raised.

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- 3 Fill in the blanks:

- i) According to Gordon Childe Neolithic culture represents a (dependent/self sufficient) food producing economy.
- ii) (Ground stone/Copper) tools remain the essential characteristic of Neolithic culture.
- iii) Jericho is the earliest known village with a (water tank/mud fortification).
- iv) Catal Huyuk was a (large/small) village in (Turkey/Iran).

4.4 EARLY FARMERS OF THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT

The history of domestication of plants and animals in the sub-continent practically began with the emergence of neolithic cultures. Except for ground stone axes all the neolithic cultures of the sub-continent can be classified into the geographical regions as mentioned in Chart-2

Chart 2 Regions of the Indian Sub-continent.

North-Western region—(including Afghanistan and Western Pakistan particularly the Kachi plains in Baluchistan)

Northern region—(covering the Kashmir Valley).

South-eastern U.P.—(covering the Vindhyan outcrops in the districts of Allahabad, Mirzapur, Reva and Sidhi—particularly the Belan Valley).

Mid-eastern region—(northern Bihar).

North-eastern region—(covering Assam and adjacent sub-Himalayan region).

Central-eastern-region—(covering Chhota Nagpur plateau with extensions in Orissa and West-Bengal).

Southern region—(covering the Peninsular India).

We shall discuss the characteristics of the Neolithic cultures in these regions separately.

4.4.1 North-Western Region

It was in this region (present day Afghanistan and Pakistan) that we find the earliest evidence of the origin of wheat and barley cultivation. In northern Afghanistan, caves occupied by hunters and gatherers have been discovered by archaeologists. These caves contained the bone remains of wild sheep, cattle and goat. By about 7000 B.C. sheep and goat were domesticated in Afghanistan. It is believed that the Central Asian region and its peripheries comprising the present day Punjab, Kashmir, West-Pakistan, Afghanistan and Soviet Republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and West Tian Shan were the original places of bread-wheat and spelt-wheat cultivation.

Beginning of agriculture and domestication of animals in Baluchistan (in Pakistan) are attested by archaeological excavations. The Kachi plains in Baluchistan have several advantages which contributed to the appearance of early farming economy in the region. Located between the barren ranges of inner Baluchistan, the small valleys consisting of fertile alluvium brought by the streams from the hills and perennial river systems make irrigation easy on stretches of land which had vegetation.

It is in this ecological setting that the ancient site of Mehrgarh is located at about 150 Km from Quetta. Excavations at the site have revealed a long cultural history for the region ranging from the pre-pottery Neolithic to the mature Harappan Period. The Neolithic levels at Mehrgarh have been classified into two phases, (i) the early aceramic without pottery and (ii) the later phase.

The cereals cultivated here included two varieties of barley and three varieties of wheat. charred seeds of plum and also of date were found from the very beginning of the settlement.

During the excavations, the earliest, layers of the Neolithic period (Period-I) yielded bones of wild animals like gazelles, swamp deer, antelopes, sheep, goat and cattle. But the top layers (later phase of the Neolithic deposits) yielded bones of domesticated cattle, sheep and goat besides bones of wild gazelles, pig and onager. Thus, there is clear cut evidence that the process of the domestication of sheep and goat was done locally. Here, the beginning of the pre-pottery settlement phase has been fixed to about 6000 B.C.

The subsistence pattern of the Neolithic period is characterised by a mixed economy based on early farming and domestication of animals supplemented by hunting. The inhabitants lived in rectangular houses of mud-bricks. Some of the structures were divided into small square compartments and used for storage. The tool kit included one stone axe, five stone adzes, twenty five grinding stones and sixteen mauls supplemented by abundant microliths of typical blade industry. Some of the blades show sheen which is characteristic of flint used to cut grains.

On the basis of evidence from Mehrgarh it appears that Kachi plains may have been an independent epi-centre (centre of origin) for cattle and sheep domestication and for cultivation of wheat and barley. Period-II at Mehrgarh represents the Chalcolithic phase (5000 B.C.), from which cultivation of cotton and grape is attested in addition to the cultivation of wheat



8. Neolithic Houses (Mehrgarh)

and barley. Probably the Harappans inherited the knowledge of wheat, barley, and cotton cultivation from their early ancestors at Mehrgarh. (For the Harappans read the next Block). The idea that farming and domestication of animals spread from West Asia to the direction of the Indian sub-continent may thus have to be given up in the light of the evidence which Mehrgarh provides.

Village settlements appeared in the Kashmir valley by about 2500 B.C. Excavations at Burzahom and Gufkral throw significant light on the Neolithic culture of this region. The Neolithic stage of this region has been classified into two phases at Burzahom and three at Gufkral. At the latter site the earliest phases is aceramic (pre-pottery,) discovered for the first time in India. The Neolithic culture of Kashmir valley is characterised by pit-dwellings with well made floors smeared with red-ochre as well as dwellings in the open. The presence of a large number of unique bone tools suggests that the economy was predominantly a hunting economy.



9. Dwelling Pit (Burzahom)



10. Corridor joining two Dwelling Pits

At Gufkral, in Phase-I charred wild grains of lentil, masur, pea, wheat and barley were found besides bones of wild animals such as cattle, sheep, goat, ibex, red deer and wolf. Phases II and III are characterised by the presence of domesticated plants and animals. Other notable objects found from the later phases are long celts, stone points, sophisticated bone tools (harpoons, arrowheads, etc.) and perforated harvesters. Dog burials placed along some of the human burials have also been reported. These findings indicate how an essentially hunting- gathering economy of Phase I gradually developed into a well settled agricultural economy in Phase II.

It is worth mentioning here that the Neolithic culture of Burzahom displays affinities with Sarai Khola and Ghaligai of Swat valley in pottery, bone and stone objects. Pit-dwellings, harvesters and dog burials are characteristics of the North Chinese Neolithic culture. Contact with the pre-Harappans is also indicated by the pottery found at Burzahom.

The available C-14 dates from the two sites indicate a time range off 2500-1500 B.C. for the Neolithic culture of the Kashmir Valley.

4.4.3 Early Farmers of the Belan Valley

The river Belan flows down from east to west along the edge of the Vindhyan plateau out-crop. It is a tributary of the Tons which joins the Ganga near Allahabad. This region is part of the monsoon belt. The entire area is covered with thick forest of teak, bomboo and *dhak*. The

forests are the natural habitat for wild animals like Tiger, Nilgai, Chital, etc. The vegetal cover is provided by thickly grown grasses including wild rice. The area was a favourite hunting ground of early stone age people down to the epi- palaeolithic period. The relevant excavated sites of the Belan Valley which indicate transition from the food-gathering stage to the food producing stage are Chopani-Mando, Koldihawa and Mahagara.



11. Beehive type huntment

At Chopani Mando a three-phase sequence from epi- palaeolithic to late Mesolithic or proto-Neolithic period has been established by archaeologists. Phase III (advanced mesolithic) is characterised by semi-sedentary community life and specialised hunting-gathering economy. Beehive type of hutments, common hearths, unportable anvils, geometric microliths, large number of ring-stones and hand-made impressed pottery were found here. Querns and mullers of wide range in forms and sizes indicate emphasis on food gathering. The phase also yields significant evidence of the presence of wild rice and bones of wild cattle, sheep and goat.

Single culture site refers to an archaeological site which was occupied for a single phase of culture like Neolithic or Chalcolithic. There are however other sites which were occupied through different cultural phases. If a site, after excavations, shows that it was under occupation during Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Iron-using phases, then it would be considered a multi-culture site and the Neolithic phase would be called Period I, the Chalcolithic phase period II and the Iron-using phase period III. These periods would show the chronological sequence of cultures at the site.

The excavations at Koldihwa revealed a three-fold cultural sequence (Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Iron Age). Mahagara is a single culture (Neolithic) site. The combined evidence from the two sites indicates sedentary life, domestication of rice (*oriza sativa*) and of cattle and sheep/goat. Other objects throwing light on the life of people living in this area are:

- Cord-impressed pottery,
- Round celts and adzes, with rectangular or oval cross-section, and *chalcidony* blades,
- Circular/oval floors littered with artefacts
- A large cattle-pen with hoof-marks of cattle
- Have also been reported from Mahagara.

The Neolithic culture of the Belan Valley shows a developed and advanced sedentary life with:

- defined family units
- standardisation of pottery forms
- portable size of food-processing units like querns and mullers
- specialised tools like chisels, celts and adzes,
- cultivation of domesticated rice,
- domestication of cattle, sheep/ and goat and horse,

It has been suggested that Neolithic farmers of the Belan Valley emerged as the earliest rice farming community in India (6th millennium B.C.), although the suggestion is not accepted by all. The transition from gathering to farming economy is also clearly documented in this region. However, pottery makes its appearance in the late mesolithic/proto-neolithic phase at Chopni Mando (circa ninth-eighth millennium B.C.). This is indicative of primacy of manufacture of pottery over domestication of plants (rice) and animals (cattle, sheep/goat and horse).

Chopni-Mando provides the earliest evidence of the use of pottery in the world.

4.4.4 Neolithic Cultures of Bihar/Mid Ganga Valley

The lower central Gangetic valley with all its flora and faunal resources was occupied by sedentary village settlements much later (2000-1600 B.C.). Excavations at Chirand, Chechar, Senuwar and Taradib, etc. throw significant light on the life pattern of the Neolithic people of this region. At Senuwar (Distt. Rohtas) the neolithic farmers cultivated rice, barley, field pea, lentil and some millets. From this site a variety of wheat and grass pea have also been found from upper levels of habitation. The neolithic levels at Chirand (Distt. Saran) situated on the left bank of the Ganga revealed the structural remains of mud floors, pottery, microliths, ground celts, bone tools and beads of semi- precious stones, besides terracotta human figurines. Both Chirand and Senuwar are known for their remarkable bone tools. The grains cultivated at Chirand were wheat, barley, rice and lentil.

The later Neolithic-Chalcolithic people at Senuwar also started cultivating gram and moong in addition to the crops raised by the earlier people.

4.4.5 Early Farmers of Eastern India

The area comprises the hills of Assam including north Cachar, the Garo and the Naga hills. Ecologically the area falls in the monsoon zone with heavy rainfall.

The Neolithic culture of this region is characterised by shouldered celts, small ground axes of rounded form and cord-impressed pottery, heavily tempered with quartz particles. Excavations at Deojali Hading in north Cachar hills have yielded all the objects noted above. These objects are the types which have extensive distribution in China and South-East Asia with a long ancestry there. Yet the affinity of Assam Neolithic traits with China or South East Asia has not been finally settled as there is a wide chronological gap. The Assam Neolithic culture phase has been tentatively dated around 2000 B.C.



12. Stone axes from Garo Hills (Assam)

4.4.6 Early Farmers of South India

The problem of transition from the stage of advanced hunting to that of food producing economy in South India has not yet been clearly established. The Neolithic settlements are found on the hilly and dry Deccan plateau drained by the Bhima, Krishna, Tungabhadra and Kaveri rivers. These settlements flourished particularly in those areas where the normal rainfall is below 25 cm per annum. Excavated sites, which throw light on the various aspects of the Neolithic culture, of the south India are Sangankallu, Nagarjunakonda, Maski, Brahmagiri, Tekkalakota, Piklihal, Kupgal, Hallur, Palavoy, Hemmige and T. Narsipur.

South Indian Neolithic culture has been classified into three phases by archaeologists. The earliest phases is represented at Sangankallu and Nagarjunakonda. The faint traces of dwellings, crude handmade pale reddish brown pottery with slipped outer surface, blade tools of chert and ground stone tools found at Nagarjunakonda, demonstrate that the people had only rudimentary knowledge of cultivation. Probably they did not domesticate animals. This phase can be dated to 2500 B.C. or earlier.

In Phase II besides the continuation of the features of Phase I, the pottery is mainly of red ware fabric. However, Lapidary art and domestication of animals are the new features. Now the microliths were made of quartz crystals.

In Phase III (datable to around 1500 B.C.) grey ware pottery, is predominant. The red ware and short blade industry of quartz crystals of Phase II continued into this phase. Neolithic tools of various types are also found in this phase. These indicate greater practice of agriculture with food gathering and hunting now assuming a subsidiary role.

The latter two phases are characterised by dwelling pits at Nagarjunakonda with roofs supported by wooden poles. Wattle-and- daub houses are reported from other sites.

Millet (*Ragi*) was one of the earliest crops cultivated by the Neolithic farmers of South India. It is cultivated even today and forms an important source of food for the poor classes. It is also used as fodder for the cattle. It is generally believed that the domesticated *Ragi* came from East Africa. The wild *Ragi*, which grew as weeds along with the domesticated variety, was not the direct ancestor of the latter. But the wild *Ragi* was ancestrally associated with the African variety. Other crops cultivated by the Neolithic farmers of south India were wheat, horsegram, and moong (green gram). Date palm was also grown. Terracing seems to have been an important feature of the method of cultivation during this period. It was employed for making tiny fields for growing crops.

The nature of animal bones found from the excavations indicates that the animals were used for draught-work or putting heavy material, and ploughing the fields. It is clear from the excavations at Nagarjunakonda that domestication of plants preceded the domestication of animals. Domesticated animals like cattle, sheep and goat, buffalo, ass, fowl, swine and horse are also reported from some sites. Sambhar deer, bara singha, spotted deer and gazelle were hunted and pond snails and tortoise were caught for food by the people.

Abundance of cattle and other kinds of food articles suggest sedentary agriculture-cum-pastoral economy of the Neolithic people. On the basis of C-14 dates, the Neolithic culture of South India has been placed between 2600 and 1000 B.C.

Many ashmounds (composed of ash) are found in the vicinity of Neolithic sites like Utnur, Kodekal and Kupgal. Some of the them are also found in forests, remote from any settlement. It has been suggested that these ashmounds were the sites of the Neolithic cattle-pens. From time to time the accumulated dung was burned either by design as a part of some ritual or by accident. Some of the ashmounds in remoter areas may suggest seasonal migrations to the forest grazing grounds by the people.

4.4.7 Neolithic Cultures of Upper Central and Western Deccan

In the middle and the upper reaches of the Krishna and the Godavari and their tributaries, the picture is somewhat different. In these regions besides the ground stone tools made on black trap, a large number of parallel-sided blades and microliths of agate, chacedony and carnelian (all semi-precious stones) were found along with grey ware and Chalcolithic-type painted pottery. No clear-cut Neolithic phase has been recorded in this region. But the evidence from Chandoli on the Bhima, a tributary of the Krishna and from Nevasa and Daimabad, sites on the Pravara, a tributary of the Godavari, suggests that Neolithic farmers in this region had moved into the Chalcolithic phase.

Further northwards in the Tapti and Narmada valleys of north Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat no clear-cut Neolithic phase was found. Only a small number of triangular axes with pointed butt-end of South Indian affiliation found at Eran in the Bina Valley and at Jokha in South Gujarat are Neolithic finds from this region.

In the Chambal, the Banas and the Kali Sindh Valleys there is scarcely any evidence of the presence of ground stone tools. In spite of the fact that during an earlier mesolithic context domestication of animals had started, sedentary settlements started in this region only after copper-bronze implements became known.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Discuss in about 10 lines the main characteristics of The Neolithic cultures in the North-Western Region.

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- 2 Which of the following statements are right or wrong ? Mark (X) or (✓).
- i) It can be said that the Harappan people inherited the knowledge of wheat, barely and cotton cultivation from the earlier inhabitants of Mehrgarh. ()
 - ii) In Gufkral, there is no presence of domesticated plants and animals. ()
 - iii) Excavations at Belan Valley sites have helped us in determining the nature of transition from food gathering to food producing stage. ()
 - iv) A single culture site means a combination of various cultures into one cultural site. ()
 - v) The earliest crop cultivated in South India was millet. ()
 - vi) Excavations at Cachar Hills have yielded no traces of Neolithic culture. ()
- 3 What do the finds of pottery, ground tools and mud hutments, etc. indicate in terms of development in human society ?
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-
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4.5 LET US SUM UP

This Unit has made you aware of the basic characteristics of the stage characterized by transition to cultivation of plants and domestication of animals. The transition from hunting/gathering to cultivation brought about many changes. Generally speaking these included fashioning of pottery which was obviously needed for storing grains as well as eating food processed from them, refined tools which were ground and effective for agricultural operations, settled villages communities, etc.

Recent evidence seems to suggest that the earliest farming operations started in the Nile valley and in Western Asia. These operations emerged at a later date. In certain regions the process of cultivation of crops and domestication of animals went side by side whereas in some regions cultivation of crops preceded domestication of animals.

In the Unit you have also been familiarised with the geographical regions in which evidence of the Neolithic stage of culture has been found in the Indian sub-continent. The Neolithic cultures in these regions emerged at different points of time, and their duration were also different. Due to ecological variations within the sub-continent, the crops grown also varied. The emergence of Neolithic cultures and variations between them have been shown by archaeologists through extensive excavations at various ancient sites.

4.6 KEY WORDS

Epi-Palaeolithic: Early palaeolithic period.

Hunting-gathering Economy: Refers to that stage of economy which was dependent on hunting and gathering of foods.

Hunters-gatherers: Refers to that stage of human development when human beings procured their foods through hunting and collecting from nature.

Proto-Neolithic: The stage before the beginning of the Neolithic period.

Sedentary life : Refers to that stage of human development when human beings started settled life.

Terracing : Method of cultivating crops by which hilly lands are divided into steps for cultivation.

4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Your answer should include the shift from Hunter-gatherers to food producing process through cultivation of wheat, barley etc., settled village life; advances made in the making of stone tools; the emergence of pottery, etc. See Section 4.2.
- 2 These were: that domestication of plants and animals are not necessarily interrelated; food production might have preceded Neolithic cultures, etc. See Sub-sec. 4.3.1.
- 3 i) Self sufficient ii) Ground stone
iii) Mud fortification iv) large, Turkey.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 See Sub-sec. 4.4.1.
- 2 i) $\checkmark$ ii) $\times$ iii) $\checkmark$ iv) $\times$ v) $\checkmark$ vi) $\times$
- 3 You have to apply your imagination to answer this. Well all these indicate a process during which human beings were moving from simple to complex societies; Division of labour; advances in technology; need based inventions, etc. are some hints for your answer.

4.8 SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| (1) D.P. Agrawal | <i>The Archaeology of India</i> , Select Book Service, New Delhi. 1984. |
| (2) Bridget and Raymond Allchin | <i>The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan</i> , (Indian edition), Select Book Service, New Delhi 1988. |
| (3) S.C. Malik | <i>Indian Civilization : The Formative Period</i> . Simla, 1968. |
| (4) B.P. Sahu | <i>From Hunters to Breeders</i> . Anamika Prakashan, Delhi 1988. |
| (5) H.D. Sankalia | <i>Prehistory and Protohistory in India and Pakistan</i> , University of Bombay, 1962 |

UNIT 5 ANTECEDENTS, CHRONOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 An Old City is Discovered
- 5.3 The Age of the Harappan Civilization
- 5.4 Why it is called the Harappan Civilization
- 5.5 Antecedents
- 5.6 Geographical Features
- 5.7 Origins of Agriculture and Settled Villages
- 5.8 The Early Harappan Period
 - 5.8.1 Southern Afghanistan
 - 5.8.2 Quetta Valley
 - 5.8.3 Central and Southern Baluchistan
 - 5.8.4 The Indus Area
 - 5.8.5 Punjab and Bahawalpur
 - 5.8.6 Kalibangan
- 5.9 Emergence of the Harappan Civilization
- 5.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.11 Key Words
- 5.12 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

5.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to learn:

- how the Harappan Civilization was discovered,
- how its chronology was determined,
- how the village communities gradually evolved into the Harappan Civilization, and
- the geographical spread of the Harappan Civilization.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Block 1 you learnt about the evolution of mankind from hunting gathering societies to agricultural societies. The invention of agriculture led to far reaching changes in human societies. One important result was the emergence of cities and civilizations. In this Unit you will be made familiar with the birth of one such civilization namely the Harappan civilization.

5.2 AN OLD CITY IS DISCOVERED

In 1826 an English man Charles Masson visited a village named Harappa in Western Punjab (now in Pakistan). He noted the remarkably high walls, and towers of a very old settlement. He believed that this city belonged to the times of Alexander the Great. In 1872, a famous archaeologist Sir Alexander Cunningham came to this place. The people of the surrounding areas told him that the high mounds of Harappa were parts of a thousand year old city. It had been ruined because of the wickedness of its king. Cunningham collected some archaeological objects from this site but he could not determine to which period of history they really belonged. He simply believed that these objects were probably from outside India. Thus, he concurred with the opinion of the people of the village that the city was about a thousand years old. However, in 1924, when another archaeologist John Marshall reported about

Harappa he talked about the discovery of a long forgotten civilization. This civilization was as old as the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Is it not curious? The people of the surrounding areas were indifferent to the remains of the city. Then an archaeologist came and informed us that the city was about five thousand years old. How could the people and the scholars form such different ideas? What could be their methods of dating an old site?

5.3 THE AGE OF THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

Archaeologists use various methods for finding out how old various settlements are. Let us see how Marshall concluded that the Harappan civilization was about five thousand years old and not one thousand years old, as believed by Cunningham. Marshall found that the seals, sealings, written script and works of art found in Harappa were totally different from those with which scholars were already familiar and which belonged to a much later period. Similar finds were reported in another place called Mohenjodaro in Sind. In Mohenjodaro the settlement lay underneath a Buddhist monastery belonging to the Kushan period. It has been found that in ancient times if a house was destroyed for some reason people would generally use the brick or mud of the house to prepare a plinth and make another house on top of it. Thus, if an archaeologist excavates an area and finds remains of a house beneath another house, he can figure out that the one below is older than the one above. That is why the deeper he digs the earlier he moves in the time scale. Thus, Marshall could find out that the houses below the Buddhist monastery must have been older than the Kushan period. Then, there was the evidence that people living in these settlements did not know the use of iron. This meant that these cities were part of an age when iron was unknown. Iron came in use in the beginning of the second millennium B.C. When Marshall published his discoveries some other writers found objects similar to those of Harappa and Mohenjodaro in Mesopotamia. Mesopotamian cities came into existence in the early 3rd millennium B.C. Thus, if anything Harappan was discovered in the ancient cities of Mesopotamia it would indicate that the people of Harappa lived at the same time. With these evidences scholars could figure out that the conclusions of the local population and Cunningham were incorrect. Marshall's chronology of Harappa has been further supported by new methods of dating, such as Radio carbon dating. Thus, scholars accept the following chronology for the pre-Harappan and Harappan cultures.

The Chronology of Pre-Harappan and Harappan Cultures

5500 B.C.	Neolithic	In Baluchistan and the Indus plains settlements like Mehrgarh and Kili Ghul Muhammad came up. Beginning with
to		pastoralism with limited cultivation and seasonal occupation
3500 B.C.		of the villages, permanent villages emerged. Knowledge of wheat, barley, dates, cotton and sheep, goat and cattle. Evidences of mud houses, pottery and Craft-production found.
3500 B.C.	Early	Many more settlements established in the hills and the plains.
to	Harappan	Largest numbers of villages occur in this period. Use of
2600 B.C.	Period	copper, wheel and plough. Extra-ordinary range of pottery forms showing beginning of many regional traditions. Evidence of granary, defensive walls, and long distance trade. Emergence of uniformities in the pottery tradition throughout the Indus Valley. Also, the origins of such motifs as Pipal, humped bulls, Cobras, horned deity etc.
2600 B.C.	Mature	Emergence of large cities, uniform types of bricks, weights,
to	Harappan	seals, beads and pottery. Planned township and long distance
1800 B.C.	Period	trade.
1800 B.C.	Late	Many Harappan sites abandoned. Interregional exchange
Onwards	Harappan	declines. Writing and city life abandoned. Continuation of
	Period	Harappan Crafts and pottery tradition. The village cultures of Punjab, Sutlej-Jamuna divide and Gujarat imbibe the Harappan crafts and pottery traditions.

5.4 WHY IT IS CALLED HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

Beginning with the discovery of Harappa, nearly thousand settlements having similar traits, have been discovered. Scholars named it the 'Indus Valley Civilization' because initially most of the settlements were discovered in the plains of the river Indus and its tributaries. Archaeologists however prefer to call it the 'Harappan Civilization'. This is because in archaeology there is a convention that when an ancient culture is described, it is named after the modern name of the site which first revealed the existence of this culture. We do not know what those people called themselves because we have not been able to read their writing. Thus, we call them Harappans after the modern place Harappa where the evidence of this forgotten civilization was first unearthed in our times.

5.5 ANTECEDENTS OF THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

When we use the term "The Harappan Civilization" we are referring to a large number of cities, towns and villages which flourished in the 3rd millennium B.C. These cities and villages had formed a network of interaction over a large geographical

Map I : Sites of Early Harappan Period



space. This geographical space would roughly cover the areas of modern day Rajasthan, Punjab, Gujarat, Pakistan and some of the surrounding areas. If we study the remains left by the people who lived in these areas before the emergence of the Harappan civilization, we can have some idea of how cities emerged. Scholars believe that there was a time in human past when cities did not exist and people lived in small villages. One might ask what the ancestors of the Harappans were doing before they built up the towns and cities. There are evidences to suggest that the forefathers of the Harappans were living in villages and small towns. Some of them engaged in pastoral nomadic activities, and some went in for trade. The Harappan civilization represents the culmination of a long period of evolution of agricultural and semi-nomadic communities. So, let us review the pre-history of the Harappan civilization. We start with an understanding of their geography.

5.6 GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The areas of present day Pakistan and North-Western India formed the core region of the Harappan civilization. These areas are characterised by dry weather and scanty rainfall. However, there are some important variations among these areas. Whereas the areas of Punjab and Sind are dominated by the alluvial plains of the Indus river system, the areas of Baluchistan are characterised by steep craggy hills. In North-Eastern Baluchistan the valley floors might provide some possibilities of agriculture. This area has been inhabited by another set of people also, namely pastoral nomads. These pastoral nomads with their herds of sheep, goat and cattle kept shifting from uplands to low lands in search of pastures for their herd. The areas of these border lands which cut out into the Indus plains are a continuation of the eastern Iranian Plateau. These hilly regions are fractured by many passes, like those of Khyber, Gomal and Bolan. These have acted as highways of traffic for nomads, merchants, warriors and various groups of people. The interaction among the population of the uplands of Baluchistan and plains of the Indus on the one hand and the communities of Iran on the other seems to be related to this geographical feature. The similarities in the climate and landscape of the Harappan civilization and those of Iran, Iraq borderlands had led scholars to hypothesize that agricultural communities must have emerged in these areas in roughly the same period. In Iran and Iraq agriculture began around eight thousand B.C. Let us see what are the evidence for the beginning of agriculture in and around the Indus system.

5.7 ORIGINS OF AGRICULTURE AND SETTLED VILLAGES

The earliest evidence for the emergence of agricultural communities comes from a place called Mehrgarh, near the Bolan pass in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan (Also see Unit 4 of Block-1). Beginning as a seasonal camp the place turned into a settled village in the 5th millennium B.C. itself. People in this place were growing wheat, barley, cotton and dates and tending sheep, goat and cattle. Mehrgarh is located at the place where the alluvial plains of the Indus join the uneven hilly plateau of the Indo-Iranian border land. People of Mehrgarh lived in mud houses which could sometimes have five to six rooms. By the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C. many small and large villages had sprung up around the Indus, Baluchistan and Afghanistan area. The better known settlements among them are Kili Ghul Muhammad in Baluchistan and Mundigak in Afghanistan. In the Indus flood plains villages like Jalilpur near Harappa had come into existence. Once these agriculturists learnt to exploit the highly fertile flood plains of the Indus there was a sudden expansion in the size and numbers of villages. These agriculturists gradually learnt to exploit the Indus plains and to control the flooding of the Indus. Richer returns per acre planted resulted in larger surpluses. This led to an increase in the number of settlements in Sindh, Rajasthan, Baluchistan and other areas. They also managed to exploit stone quarries and mines useful to them. There are indications of the existence of pastoral nomadic communities in this period in the form of seasonal settlements. The interactions with these groups seem to have helped agriculturists exploit resources from other regions as the pastoral nomads are known to engage in trading activities

over the areas they cover during their travels. All this led to the development of small towns. The period of this new development is called 'the Early Harappan' because of certain uniformities found all over the Indus.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - i) John Marshall said that the Harappan Civilization was five thousand years old.
 - ii) People of the Harappan settlements were aware of the use of iron.
 - iii) It is called the Harappan Civilization because Harappa was the first site to be discovered.
 - iv) We have evidence to suggest that the forefathers of the Harappans were living in large cities.
- 2 Write ten lines on the geographical features of the early Harappan Civilization.

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5.8 THE EARLY HARAPPAN PERIOD

We shall review the conditions of some of the settlements just before the emergence of the Harappan civilization. Many scholars call this period 'The Early Harappan' period because they believe that this was the formative epoch of the Harappan civilization when certain trends of cultural unification are in evidence.

5.8.1 Southern Afghanistan

In Southern Afghanistan there is a place called Mundigak. It seems to have been located on a trade route. That is why in the early Indus period, the inhabitants of this place were using artifacts which show affinities with some Iranian towns on the one hand and some Baluchistan towns on the other. Making an humble beginning as the camping site of some nomadic groups, the place grew into a township of impressive proportions. There is evidence of a defensive wall with square bastions of sun dried bricks. A large building with rows of pillars has been identified as a palace. Another large structure looks like a temple. A variety of potteries have also been discovered at this place. They were using naturalistic decorations showing birds, ibex, bull and Pipal trees. Terracotta female figurines similar to those found in contemporary sites in Baluchistan have also been found. They were also using bronze shafthole azes and adzes. Such semi precious stones as lapis-lazuli and steatite show their contacts with Iran and central Asia since these stones are not available locally.

5.8.2 Quetta Valley

To the South east of Mundigak is the Quetta valley. Here, in a place called Damb Sadaat, large houses having brick walls belonging to the beginning of the 3rd millennium B.C. have been discovered. Varieties of painted potteries similar to those of Mundigak have also been found. These people were using clay seals and copper

objects also. These discoveries indicate the presence of a prosperous community which had solved its food problem and established trading contacts with regions faraway. Similarly, from the surrounding areas there are reports of distinct art and pottery traditions. In a place called Rana Ghundai people were using finely made painted pottery with friezes of humped bulls in black. The pottery showed distinct parallels with those of the Quetta valley. Another excavated site Periano Ghundai has yielded female figurines of a distinctive type.

5.8.3 Central and Southern Baluchistan

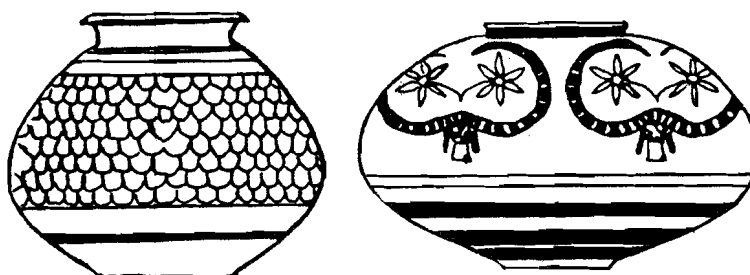
In the central and southern Baluchistan sites like Anjira, Togau, Nindowari and Balakot give us some idea of the early Harappan societies. These small villages and townships seem to fan out in conformity with the valley systems. In Balakot remains of large buildings have been discovered. Many of the sites in this area show evidences of contact with Persian Gulf. In Balakot the people who first inhabited the place were using potteries similar to those used in other contemporary villages in Baluchistan. However, in course of time they started using potteries similar to the ones used in the Indus alluvial plain. What is important to us is that the people of the entire Baluchistan province were using similar kinds of pottery. They show distinct influences from the Persian Gulf towns on the one hand and from the Indus valley towns on the other. They were using motifs on their pottery like the humped bull and Pipal which continued into the Mature Harappan phase.

5.8.4 The Indus Area

By the middle of the 4th millennium B.C. the Indus alluvial plains become the focal point of change. Many small and large settlements came into existence on the banks of the Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra. This area became the core region of the Harappan civilization. In the present discussion we shall try to show how these developments anticipate many of the characteristics of the Harappan civilization.

i) Amri

The Sind province corresponding to the lower Indus plains showed interesting development. At the site of Amri the habitations show people living in houses of stone and mud brick. They had constructed some kind of a granary also. They painted such animal motifs as the humped Indian bulls on their pottery. This motif was very popular during the 'Mature Harappan' phase. They were using wheel-made pottery. Similar finds have been reported in places like Tharro and Kohtras Buti. They had fortified their settlements before the coming of the Harappan civilization.



1. a) Early Indus Pottery : Kot Diji b) Early Indus Pottery : Kalibangan

ii) Kot Diji

Opposite Mohenjodaro on the left bank of the river Indus is the site of Kot Diji. The people living here in the 'Early Harappan' period had a massive defensive wall built around their settlement. The most interesting finds are their pottery. They were using a wheel-thrown pottery having decorations of plain bands of dark brownish paint. This kind of pottery has been reported from the pre-Harappan habitations in far flung places like Kalibangan in Rajasthan and Mehrgarh in Baluchistan. The Kot-Diji variety of pottery has been found along the entire stretch of the river Indus where settlements belonging to the pre-urban and urban phase of the Harappan civilization have been reported. This movement towards similar methods of decorating pottery indicates greater communication among the people of the Indus plains. It also anticipates the process of the convergence of cultures seen in the Harappan Civilization. Many of the designs

on the pottery were carried over to the urban phase. At the same time certain other earthen vessels showed similarity with those of Mundigak. This shows the enlarged interaction sphere of the early Harappan sites. In Mohenjodaro itself archaeologists have discovered occupation deposits to a depth of 39 feet below the modern level of the plain. Similarly, at the site of Chanhudaro, 'Early Harappan' habitation has been reported. At Mohenjodaro the early levels could not be excavated but many archaeologists believe that these occupation levels represented an 'Early Harappan' culture, probably similar to that of Kot Diji.

iii) Mehrgarh

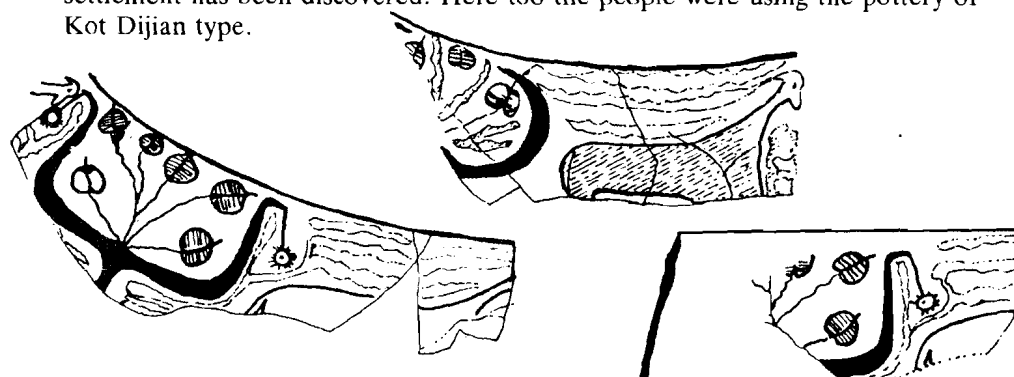
Earlier we talked about the site of Mehrgarh. In the period preceding the Harappan urbanisation, the people of Mehrgarh had established a prosperous township. They used to make various kinds of beads of stone. Lapis-lazuli, one of the precious stones used by them is found only in the Badakshan region of Central Asia. Many seals and sealings have been reported. Seals are used as a mark of authority in situations of interpersonal exchange. The Mehrgarh seals were probably used by merchants for guaranteeing the quality of goods that were being sent to faraway lands. Similarities in the designs of potteries, terracotta figurines and objects of copper and stone indicate that these people were in close contact with the neighbouring towns of Iran. However, most of the pottery used by the people of Mehrgarh was similar to the ones used in the neighbouring settlements of Damb Sadaat and the Quetta Valley. Similarly a large number of female terracotta figurines are also found. They are very similar to the ones found in Zhob Valley. These parallels indicate a close interaction among the surrounding communities.

iv) Rahman Dheri

If we follow the river Indus northwards we come across some more settlements which give us an idea of how people lived in 'Early Harappan' times. At a place called Rahman Dheri an 'Early Indus' township has been excavated. Oblong in shape with houses, streets and lanes laid out in a planned fashion, it is protected by a massive wall. Here too, beads of turquoise and lapis lazuli have been found. This shows their contact with Central Asia. A large number of graffiti found on the pot sherds could be the forerunners of the Harappan script. The independent pottery tradition in this area was gradually modified and supplemented by a pottery similar to that of Kot Diji. Seals, tools made of stone, copper and bronze have also been found.

v) Tarkai Qila

In the Bannu area, in the north west frontier province the site of Tarkai Qila has also yielded evidence of fortification. Archaeologists have discovered large samples of grains which included many varieties of wheat and barley, lentils and field pea. Tools for harvesting have also been found. In the same area, at a site called Levan, a huge factory site for making stone tools was discovered. The Harappans and their predecessors did not know about iron and copper was rare. So most of the people used tools made of stone. That is why in some places where good quality stone was available tools would be made on a large scale and then sent to distant towns and villages. The people in Levan were making ground stone axes, hammers, querns, etc. For this they were importing suitable rocks from the surrounding areas too. The presence of lapis lazuli and terracotta figurines indicates links with Central Asia. At the site of Sarai Khola which is located on the northern tip of western Punjab another 'Early Harappan' settlement has been discovered. Here too the people were using the pottery of Kot Dijian type.



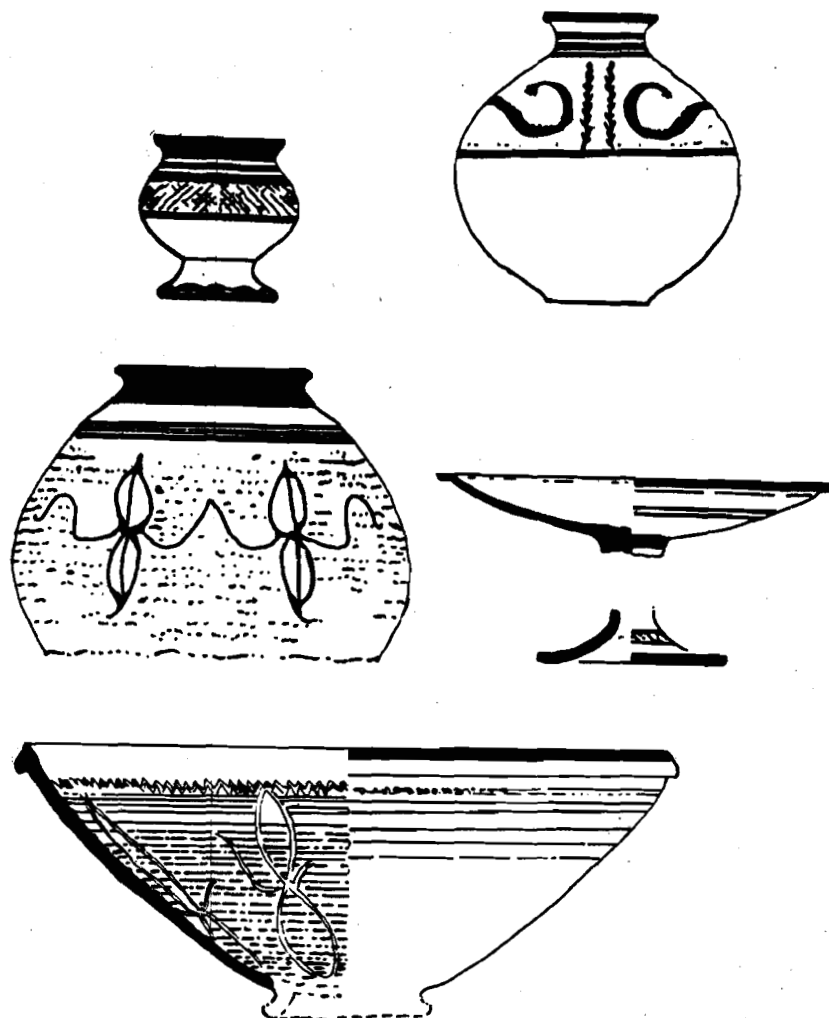
2. Painted pot showing heads of buffalo and pipal leaf decorations found in Levan.

5.8.5 Punjab and Bahawalpur

In western Punjab, Harappa is well known. During one of the excavations, habitations preceding the urban phase have been discovered. Unfortunately they have not been excavated as yet. The pottery found here seems to have similarities with the Kot Dijian ware. Scholars believe that these habitations represent the 'Early Harappan' phase in Harappa. In the Bahawalpur area about 40 sites of the 'Early Harappan' period have been located in the dry bed of the Hakra river. Here too the 'Early Harappan' is characterised by the Kot Dijian type of pottery. A comparative analysis of the settlement pattern of these sites shows that in the 'Early Harappan' period itself a variety of habitations had come up. Whereas most of the sites were simple villages, some of them were carrying out specialised industrial activities. That is why we find that most of the sites averaged about five to six hectares in size, Gamanwala spreads over an area of 27.3 hectares. This means that Gamanwala was larger than the Harappan township of Kalibangan. These larger townships must have carried administrative and industrial activities apart from agricultural activities.

5.8.6 Kalibangan

The site of Kalibangan in north Rajasthan has also yielded evidence of the 'Early Harappan' period. People lived in houses of mud bricks. The mud bricks had standard sizes. They also had a rampart around the settlement. The pottery used by them was different in shape and design from that of other areas. However, some of the pottery was similar to that of Kot Diji. A few varieties of potteries like the 'offering stand' continued to be used during the urban phase. A remarkable find was that of a ploughed field surface. This proves that even at this stage the cultivators already knew about the plough. In more primitive situations the farmers either simply broadcast the seeds or used hoes for digging the fields. With plough one can dig deeper using much less energy. That is why it is considered an advanced tool of cultivation having potentialities of increasing the food production.



3. Early Indus Pottery : Kalibangan

In the dry bed of Ghaggar, on the Indian site, several 'Early Harappan' settlements have been found. They seem to line the now extinct water ways of the region. Sites like Sothi Bara and Siswal have reported ceramic styles similar to those of Kalibangan. The exploitation of the Khetri copper mines in Rajasthan might have begun in the 'Early Harappan' period itself.

We have stressed upto the similarities found in the cultural traditions of diverse agricultural communities living in and around the Indus regions in the Early Harappan period. Beginning with small agricultural settlements the areas of Baluchistan, Sind, Punjab and Rajasthan saw the emergence of distinct regional traditions. However, the use of similar kinds of potteries, representations of a horned deity and finds of terracotta mother goddesses show the way to the emergence of a unifying tradition. The people of Baluchistan had already established trading relations with the towns of Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Thus, the 'Early Harappan' anticipate many of the achievements of the Harappan civilization.

We have seen the developments that took place over a period of nearly three thousand years. Cultivators colonised the alluvial plains of the Indus during this period. These communities were using tools of copper, bronze and stone. They were using plough and wheeled transport for the greater productivity of labour. Also unlike in Iran, where sheep and goat rearing was prevalent, the Indus people reared cattle. This gave them better possibilities of harnessing animal power for transportation and possibly cultivation. At the same time a gradual unification too took place in the pottery tradition. In the 'Early Harappan' period a particular kind of pottery first identified in Kot Diji spread over almost the entire area of Baluchistan, Punjab and Rajasthan. Terracotta mother goddesses or the motif of horned deity could be seen in Kot Diji or Kalibangan. Some of the communities surrounded themselves with defensive walls. We do not know the purpose behind the construction of these walls. It could be defense against other communities or it could be simply a bund against flooding. All these developments were taking place in the context of a much larger network of relationships with the contemporary sites of Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia.

5.9 EMERGENCE OF THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

In the backdrop of these processes of technological and ideological unification emerged the Harappan Civilization. The particular mechanisms of the birth of the civilization are obscure because we have not read their script and a lot many more excavations need to be carried out. Some of the general processes have been outlined above. The increasingly efficient technology and the exploitation of the fertile plains of the Indus must have given richer returns of grain production. This created the possibilities for larger surpluses. It would also lead to increase in population. At the same time trading contacts would be established with distant communities by the richer section of the society who would like to possess precious commodities. The larger surpluses would also permit the elaboration of non-farming specialisation. That is how the village priest could become the part of a clan of priests spread over the entire region. Similar processes will occur in the case of metallurgists, potters and craftsmen. In villages small silos for keeping grains would be transformed into elaborate granaries.

The existence of very many agricultural groups and pastoral nomadic communities in close contact with each other could lead to conflict among them. Once the agriculturalists had become prosperous they would attract other groups which might be less fortunate. The pastoral nomads are known to engage in trading and looting, depending on their own economic conditions.

The agricultural communities too could fight with each other for the control of more fertile tracts of land. Probably that is the reason why some of the communities surrounded themselves with a defence wall. We know that at the time of the emergence of the Harappan civilization many sites like Kot Diji and Kalibangan were destroyed by fire. We do not know the reasons behind this. They could simply be accidental conflagrations. However, what seems more plausible is the fact that among the various competing communities in the Indus region one set of people established their power over others. This signalled the beginning of the 'Mature Harappan'

period. Thus, the 'Mature Harappan' period would not begin on one particular date considering the large geographical space covered by the Harappan Civilization. It is likely that city as the centre of evolution emerged over a long span of time covering hundreds of years, but the city had arrived and it was there to dominate the entire north-west for the next seven-eight hundred years.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - i) People of the early Harappan period were involved in active trade with Iran and Central Asia.
 - ii) Many characteristics of the Mature Harappan phase had already taken shape in the plains of river Indus.
 - iii) There is no evidence of any communication between different areas of the Indus plains.
 - iv) The pottery used in Kalibangan was the same in shape and design as used in other areas, during the early Harappan period.
- 2 How did different areas of the early Harappan period evolve into a civilization? Write in ten lines.

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5.10 LET US SUM UP

The discovery of the Harappan civilization holds a very special significance for the study of the Indian history. It altered the origins of the Indian history and stretched it much further back so as to put it at par with the other oldest civilizations of the world namely Egypt and Mesopotamia. The discovery of the Harappan civilization was a result mainly of the archaeological sources. In this Unit you learnt about the process through which the civilization came to be discovered, various details about the stages through which the early Harappan civilization passed, its gradual evolution and the spreading out into many areas. In the subsequent units of this block you will become familiar with many other aspects related to the society and economy of the Harappan people.

5.11 KEY WORDS

Seal : A piece of wax or stone or some other material, in which some design is carved. It is used as a means of authentication.

Sealing : The object carrying the stamp of the seal.

Radio-Carbon Dating : It is also called C-14 dating. It is a method of measuring in dead organic matter the radio-active isotope C-14 which disappears at a known and calculable rate.

Nomadism : A way of life associated with cattle herders and foraging communities. People do not stay at one place but keep moving from one place to another.

Pastoral Nomadism : A social organisation associated with cattle and sheep-goat herders who move from one place to another in search of pastures.

Chronology : The method of computing time.

Alluvial Plain : The area bordering the river bank on which fine material is deposited by the river in the time of flood.

5.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1 (i) ✓ (ii) × (iii) ✓ (iv) ×

2 See Section 5.6

Check Your Progress 2

1 (i) ✓ (ii) ✓ (iii) × (iv) ×

2 Your answers should refer to increasing efficient technology, creation of food surplus, consequent growth in population, growing specialisation and increase in trade. Also see the end of Sub-sec. 5.8.5 and Section 5.9.

UNIT 6 MATERIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 From Villages to Towns and Cities
- 6.3 Harappan Civilization : Sources
- 6.4 Geographical Spread
- 6.5 Important Centres
 - 6.5.1 Harappa
 - 6.5.2 Mohenjodaro
 - 6.5.3 Kalibangan
 - 6.5.4 Lothal
 - 6.5.5 Sutkagen-Dor
- 6.6 Material Characteristics
 - 6.6.1 Town-Planning
 - 6.6.2 Pottery
 - 6.6.3 Tools and Implements
 - 6.6.4 Arts and Crafts
 - 6.6.5 The Indus Script
 - 6.6.6 Subsistence Pattern
- 6.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.8 Key Words
- 6.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit deals with the geographical extent and the material features of the Harappan Civilization. It describes the main sites of Harappan Civilization as well as the material remains which characterised these sites. After reading this Unit you should be able to :

- understand that there was continuity of population and material traditions between the Early Harappan and Harappan Civilization.
- know about the geographical and climatic aspects of the settlement pattern of Harappan Civilization.
- describe the specific geographical, climatic and subsistence related characteristics of the important centres of Harappan Civilization.
- learn about the material features of the important Harappan sites and specially the uniformities in the material features of these sites.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

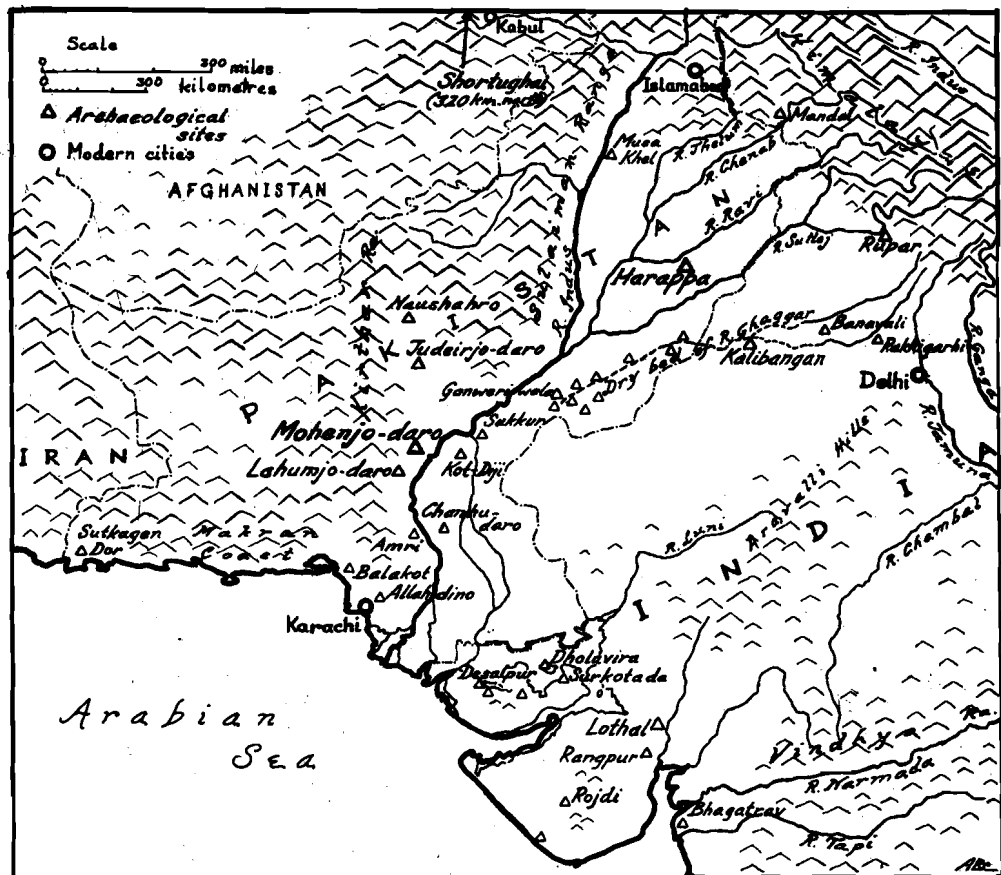
In this Unit we discuss the geographical spread and material characteristics of the Harappan Civilization which arose on the foundation of pastoral and agricultural communities and small townships. It refers to the continuity of the population and material traditions between Early Harappan and Harappan Civilization. The geographical spread of Harappan Civilization with special reference to some important centres has been highlighted. It attempts to familiarise you with the town planning, important structures, arts and crafts, housing patterns, pottery, tools and implements subsistence patterns and script of Harappan Civilization. Finally this unit also brings out the uniformities in the material characteristics of the Harappan sites.

6.2 FROM VILLAGES TO TOWNS AND CITIES

In Unit 5 we have seen how pastoral nomadic and agricultural communities established themselves in the Indus plain and how some small townships, having contacts with far away lands, had also come into existence. On the foundation of these agricultural communities and small townships emerged the 'Harappan Civilization'. By the term 'Harappan Civilization' we mean that the Harappan society was characterised by the presence and domination of large cities in this phase of its history. This would also mean the presence of specialised craftsmen, long distance trade, the existence of rich and poor people and the presence of kings. Apart from these general features common to all the Civilizations, there were some particular features of the Harappan Civilization. In the geographical space where the remains of the Harappan Civilization have been found, the communities were using the same written script. A Harappan community whether it was staying in Rajasthan or Punjab or Sind would be using the same sets of weights and measures. The copper-bronze tools used by them were also uniform in design, shape and size, the bricks they used had a proportion 4:2:1. Some of their towns were also characterised by uniformities in the planning of the buildings, citadels etc. The seals, shell (shankh) bangles, carnelian beads and the disc beads of steatite were also uniformly designed in the entire geographical space covered by the cities of the Harappan Civilization. Most of the time a Harappan site is identified by the use of a pinkish pottery with bright red slip. This pottery had standard representations of trees, animals, birds and geometric motifs in black. These uniformities in the material features of the Harappan sites were the characteristic traits of Harappan Civilization.

6.3 HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION : SOURCES

The information about the Harappan Civilization comes from the reports of excavations at places like Harappa and Mohenjodaro. The excavations at Harappa began in 1921. Very many Harappan settlements have been located and excavated since then. Famed archaeologists like Sir John Marshall and Sir Mortimer Wheeler have conducted excavations at Harappan settlements. These scholars by carefully studying the material remains have made the relics of the past speak. Since we cannot read the written words we have to draw conclusions on the basis of the study of the artefacts used by the Harappan people. By now more than 1000 settlements bearing Harappan material have been discovered. However, most of these settlements have not been excavated. According to one estimate only 3% of the reported Harappan settlements have been excavated. Even at sites where excavation work has been carried out not more than one fifth area has been excavated. Some sites like Ganweriwala in the Hakra Valley and Furuksan in Punjab which are reported to be nearly as large as Mohenjodaro have not even been touched by excavators. This is because excavation involves a very large investment of money and manpower. At present the Governments of India or Pakistan do not have sufficient money to fund these excavations. However, one thing is clear. It is that when we are making generalisations about the Harappan Civilization we have to be extremely cautious. Any new discovery or excavation report can substantially modify our views about the Harappans. For example, scholars like Mortimer Wheeler who wrote nearly twenty years ago believed that the Harappan Civilization appeared fully developed in the Indus Valley and it had little in common with the people who lived in these areas in the preceding period. However, a careful analysis of the available materials and new excavation reports have convinced archaeologists that the Harappan Civilization developed over a long period of time in and around the Indus Valley region itself. We have studied the developments in the 'Early Harappan' period in the preceding unit. We find that there was a continuity of population and technical skill between the 'Early Harappan' and Harappan periods. A process of evolution was evident in the agricultural settlements, and basic crafts and the distinct Indus style itself were probably carried over from earlier regional traditions. Since the study of the Harappan Civilization remains in many respects incomplete therefore it is one of the most challenging fields of study for students of ancient Indian history.



Map 2 : Sites of the Harappan Civilization

6.4 GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD

Scholars generally believe that the Harappa, Ghaggar, Mohenjodaro axis represents the heartland of the Harappan Civilization. Most of the Harappan settlements are located in this region. This area is characterised by certain uniformities. The entire zone is a flat stretch of land having similar subsistence pattern. Snowmelt from the Himalayas and the monsoon rains define its flooding pattern. This would create similar kinds of possibilities for agriculture and pastoralism. The Kachhi plains to the west of the Indus system is in the transitional zone of the Iranian borderlands. It is a flat alluvial outwash located at the foot of the Bolan pass and the lake Manchar. It is an inhospitable country and except for its periphery is completely dry. Sites like Nowsharo, Judeirjodaro and Ali-Murad have been reported from this area. The settlements of Sutka-koh and Sutkagen-Dor on the Makran coast represent the driest part of the hilly Baluchistan region. They are the known western boundaries of the Harappans. The Harappan settlements at Shortughai in north-eastern Afghanistan seem to have been isolated colonies of the Harappans.

The eastern borderlands of the Harappan Civilization are represented by such settlements as Bargaon, Manpur and Alamgirpur in U.P. The subsistence system of these sites located in the Ganga-Yamuna doab was in conformity to their geographical location. This area had higher rainfall and denser forests. It falls outside the zone of pastoral nomadism and falls in the wheat producing area. Therefore, it would pose different kinds of problems of settlement. This is why some scholars believe that this area represents an independent cultural province receiving stimulus from the Harappans. Manda in Jammu and Ropar in Punjab represent the northern extremities of the Harappans in India. The settlements of Daimabad in Maharashtra and Bhagatav in Gujarat might have formed the southern frontier of the Harappans.

In Gujarat, too, the settlement pattern was not uniform. There were small dissected plateaus and scraplands in Kutch and Kathiawad. On the other hand this area had a large seacoast in the Gulf of Cambay and the Rann of Kutch. The Harappans in Gujarat were familiar with rice and millet.

The Harappan Civilization seems to have covered a very large area. Its area was larger than those of the contemporary Civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt. In Mesopotamia settlements were spread out all across the riverine plains in dense clusters. However, except in the Ghaggar-Hakra region the Harappan settlements were very thinly spread out. Sites in Rajasthan and Gujarat could be divided by hundreds of kilometers of deserts and marshes. The nearest Harappan neighbour of Shortughai would be about 300 km. away. These vacant spaces might have been inhabited by primitive communities who were still surviving by hunting-gathering or by pastoral nomadism. Similarly, we get some idea of the size of population that lived in any of the Harappan cities from the studies conducted in this field. Scholars believe that the largest Harappan city i.e. Mohenjodaro had a population of about 35,000. The smallest towns of modern India would have a larger population than the biggest towns of the Harappans. We have to remember that in the Harappan period the fastest means of transport was bullock-cart, iron was unknown and the use of plough was considered a revolutionary discovery. With such primitive technology, a civilization which managed to bring together far flung areas in a complex web of socio-economic relationship was a stunning achievement in those days.

6.5 IMPORTANT CENTRES

One might ask why the Harappans tried to occupy such faraway places as Shortughai in Afghanistan or Surkotada in Gujarat. We may find the answer to this question if we try to examine the details of the location and characteristics of some important sites.

6.5.1 Harappa

Harappa was the first site to be excavated. From the 1920s onwards archaeologists like Dayaram Sahni, M.S. Vats and Mortimer Wheeler carried out excavations at Harappa. It is located on the bank of the Ravi in Western Punjab. In terms of its size and the variety of objects discovered, it ranks as the premier city of the Harappan Civilization. The ruins of the city cover a circuit of about 3 miles. What is intriguing however is the fact that there are no clusters of sites around Harappa. In Harappa a substantial section of the population was engaged in activities other than food production. These activities could relate to administration, trade, craft work or religion. Since these people were not producing food for themselves someone else would have to do it for them. Productivity was low and transportation was quite difficult. Thus, for maintaining these non-food producers the community would have to mobilise a very large number of people for procuring and transporting food from the food producing areas. However, these areas would not have been very far from the city because transportation of grains was done by bullock carts and boats. Some scholars have suggested that the surrounding villages might have been engaged in shifting cultivation in the meander flood plains of the rivers. Villages had to keep shifting according to the changes in the flood plains of the rivers. The location of Harappa in isolation can be explained by the fact that it was located in the midst of some important trade routes which are still in use. These routes connected Harappa with Central Asia, Afghanistan and Jammu. Harappa's pre-eminent position was linked to its ability to procure exotic items from faraway lands.

6.5.2 Mohenjodaro

Mohenjodaro, located in the Larkana district of Sind on the bank of the river Indus is the largest site of the Harappan Civilization. Most of the information regarding the town planning, housing, seals and sealings of this Civilization comes from Mohenjodaro. Excavations began at this site in 1922, with R.D. Banerjee and Sir John Marshall taking up the work. Later on Mackay and George Dales also conducted

excavations. Small scale excavations and plotting of the site have continued into the eighties.

Excavations show that people lived here for a very long time and went on building and rebuilding houses at the same location. As a result of this the height of the remains of the building and the debris is about seventy five feet. Ever since the time of occupation there were regular floods at Mohenjodaro. These floods caused deposition of alluvial soil. The continuous deposition of silt over the centuries has raised the level of the land around Mohenjodaro by about thirty feet. The ground water table has risen correspondingly. Thus, the oldest buildings in Mohenjodaro have been found to be about 39 feet below the level of the modern level at the plain. Archaeologists have not been able to excavate these levels because of the rise in the water table.

6.5.3 Kalibangan

The settlement of Kalibangan is located in Rajasthan along the dried up bed of the river Ghaggar. As pointed out earlier this area had the largest concentration of the Harappan settlements. Kalibangan was excavated in the 1960s under the guidance of B.K. Thapar. This place has yielded evidence for the existence of Pre-Harappan and Harappan habitations. It shows significant variation from Harappan in the sphere of religious beliefs. Some scholars have suggested that Kalibangan might have been part of the 'Eastern Domain' of the Harappan Civilization. In the areas of present day Haryana, East Punjab and Western U.P. Harappan sites like Bara, Siswal and Alamgirpur have been discovered. They give evidence of the presence of distinct local traditions in pottery along with the Harappan pottery. Kalibangan might have been a mediator between the Harappan cultural zone and the eastern provinces.

6.5.4 Lothal

In Gujarat settlements such as Rangapur, Surkotada and Lothal have been discovered. Lothal is located in the coastal flats of the Gulf of Cambay. This place seems to have been an outpost for sea-trade with contemporary West Asian societies. Its excavator S.R. Rao claims to have discovered a dockyard here.



4. Dockyard (Lothal)

6.5.5 Sutkagen-Dor

Sutkagen-Dor is located near the Makran coast which is close to the Pakistan-Iran border. At present the settlement is land-locked in dry inhospitable plains. The town had a citadel surrounded by a stone wall built for defence. Its location in an inhospitable area can only be explained by the need of sea-port for trading.

- 1 Discuss the geographical location of the important centres of Harappan Civilization.

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- 2 Match the following sites with their present day geographical location.

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|-----------------|--|
| 1) Harappa | a) Rajasthan |
| 2) Kalibangan | b) Sind (Pakistan) |
| 3) Mohenjodaro | c) Makran coast (Pakistan-Iran Border) |
| 4) Sutkagen-Dor | d) West Punjab (Pakistan) |

- 3 Mark right (✓) or wrong (×) against the following statements:

- i) Harappa, located in West Punjab, is the largest site of Harappan Civilization.
- ii) Mohenjodaro was the first Harappan site to be excavated.
- iii) Excavations at Harappa were first conducted by R.D. Banerjee and John Marshall.
- iv) Scholars believe that the Harappa, Ghaggar and Mohenjodaro axis represents the heartland of Harappan Civilization.

6.6 MATERIAL CHARACTERISTICS

In this section we discuss the material characteristics of Harappan Civilization. We take into account the town planning, pottery, tools and implements, arts and crafts, scripts and subsistence pattern of Harappan Civilization.

6.6.1 Town-Planning

Archaeologists like Mortimer Wheeler and Stuart Piggot believed that the Harappan towns had a remarkable unity of conception. This was suggested by the division of each town into two parts. In one part was a raised citadel where the rulers were staying, in the other part of the town lived the ruled and the poor. This unity of planning would also mean that if you were walking on the streets of Harappa—the houses, the temples, the granaries and the streets themselves will be almost identical to those of Mohenjodaro or any other Harappan town for that matter. The entire idea of unity of conception was derived from the notion of a community of foreigners suddenly conquering the Indus Valley and building new towns. Such towns were designed to separate the natives from the rulers. Thus, the rulers built citadels which kept them in glorious isolation. Such ideas of the sudden emergence of the Harappan towns and the unity of planning are being increasingly rejected by new scholars. The Harappan towns were located on the flood-plains of rivers, on fringes of deserts or on sea coast. This meant that people living in these different regions faced different kinds of challenges from nature. Their adaptation to environment would introduce diversity in their town-planning and life style too. Also many large and seemingly

important buildings were located in the lower city. Let us review the planning of some of the important settlements.

The settlements of Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan show certain uniformities in their planning. These cities were divided into a citadel on the west side and a lower town on the eastern side of the settlement. The citadel was built on a high podium of mud brick. The citadel seems to have contained large structures which might have functioned as administrative or ritual centres. The lower city contained residential areas. In Mohenjodaro and Harappa the citadel was surrounded by a brick wall. At Kalibangan both the citadel and the lower city were surrounded by a wall, streets ran from north to south in the lower city and cut at right angles. Obviously, this kind of alignment of streets and houses represents conscious town planning. However, the resources of the town planners in those days would be very limited. This assumption is based on the finds from Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan where the streets stagger from block to block and the alignments of streets and buildings in one part of Mohenjodaro (Moneer area) is quite different from the rest of the areas. Mohenjodaro was not constructed in homogeneous horizontal units. In fact it was built in different times. In Harappa and Mohenjodaro baked bricks were used for buildings. In Kalibangan mud bricks were used. In settlements like Kot Diji and Amri in Sind there was no fortification of the city. The site of Lothal in Gujarat also shows a very different layout. It was a rectangular settlement surrounded by a brick wall. It did not have any internal division into citadel and lower city. Along the eastern side of the town was found a brick basin which has been identified as a dockyard by its excavator. The site of Surkotada in Cutch was divided into two equal parts and the building materials were basically mud bricks and lumps of mud.



5. Mud-brick wall (Kalibangan)

Harappans were using baked and unbaked bricks of standard size. This shows that it was not the individual house owners who made their own bricks, but that brick making was organised on a large scale. Similarly, cities like Mohenjodaro showed excellent arrangements for sanitation. The waste water from houses would pass through chutes connected with public drains aligned to the margin of the streets. This again indicates the presence of a civic administration which would take decisions for the sanitary requirements of all the townsmen.

Some Large Structures

In Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan, the citadel areas contained monumental structures which must have had special functions. This is clear from the fact that they

stood on a high mud brick platform. Among these structures is the famous 'Great Bath' of Mohenjodaro. This brick built structure measures 12 m. by 7 m. and is about 3 m. deep. It is approached at either end by flights of steps. The bed of the bath was made water tight by the use of bitumen. Water was supplied by a large well in an adjacent room. There was corbelled drain for disgorging water too. The bath was surrounded by porticoes and sets of rooms. Scholars generally believe that the place was used for ritual bathing of kings, or priests.



6. Great Bath (Mohenjodaro)

Another important structure discovered in the citadel mound of Mohenjodaro is the granary. It consists of twenty seven blocks of brickwork criss-crossed by ventilation channels. Below the granary were the brick loading bays from which grains were raised into the citadel for storage. Though some scholars have questioned the identification of this structure with a granary but it is certain that this large structure must have had some important function.

To another side of the Great Bath is a long building (230 × 78 feet) which has been identified as the residence of a very high official. It includes an open court of 33 feet square on to which three verandas open. Another significant building was an assembly hall. It had four rows of five brick plinths upon which wooden columns were erected. In a row of rooms to the west of it was found a seated male statue. Among the well known buildings of Harappa is the Great Granary. It consisted of a series of brick platforms forming the base of two rows of six granaries. To the south of the granary were found rows of circular brick platforms. That they were used for threshing grains is clear from the fact that chaffs of wheat and barley were found in the crevices of the floors.

Kalibangan was a smaller city compared to Mohenjodaro and Harappa. The most significant discoveries here have been those of fire altars. A series of brick platforms were discovered. On one of them was found a row of seven 'fire altars' as well as a pit containing animal bones and antlers.

Housing Pattern

The average citizen seems to have lived in the blocks of houses in the lower city. Here too there were variations in the sizes of houses. It could be single room tenements meant for slaves like the ones discovered near the granary in Harappa. There were other houses complete with courtyards and having upto twelve rooms. The bigger houses were provided with private wells and toilets. These houses had much the same plan—a square courtyard around which were a number of rooms. The entrances to the houses were from the narrow lanes which cut the streets at right angles. No windows faced the street. This meant that the roadward facing of the house would be like a row of brick walls.

The description of the houses and townships of the Harappan Civilization indicates that there were people who owned large houses. Some of them bathed in an exclusive swimming pool (The Great Bath). There were others who lived in barracks. One can say with certainty that those who lived in larger houses belonged to the rich class whereas those living in the barracks might have been part of a servile class of labourers.

The houses in the lower city also contained a large number of workshops. Potters kilns, dyers vats and shops of metal workers, shell ornament makers and bead makers have been recognised.

6.6.2 Pottery

Among the remains discovered in the Harappan settlements pottery forms an important category. It represents the blending of the ceramic traditions of Baluchistan and the cultures east of the Indus system. Most of Harappan pottery is plain, but a substantial part is treated with a red slip and black painted decoration.

The painted decorations consist of horizontal lines of varied thickness, leaf patterns, scales, chequers, lattice work, palm and pipal trees. Birds, fishes and animals are also shown. Among the notable shapes found in the Harappan pottery are pedestal, dishes, goblets, cylindrical vessels perforated all over and various kinds of bowls. The uniformity in the forms and paintings on the pottery is difficult to explain. Normally the explanation of this uniformity is the fact that the local potters made the pottery. But in areas like Gujarat and Rajasthan a variety of other kinds of potteries continued to be produced along with the Harappan pottery. Some of the pottery has shown marks of stamp which might indicate that a few varieties of vessels were traded also. However, it is still unclear how such a large area exhibited a uniform pottery tradition.

6.6.3 Tools and Implements

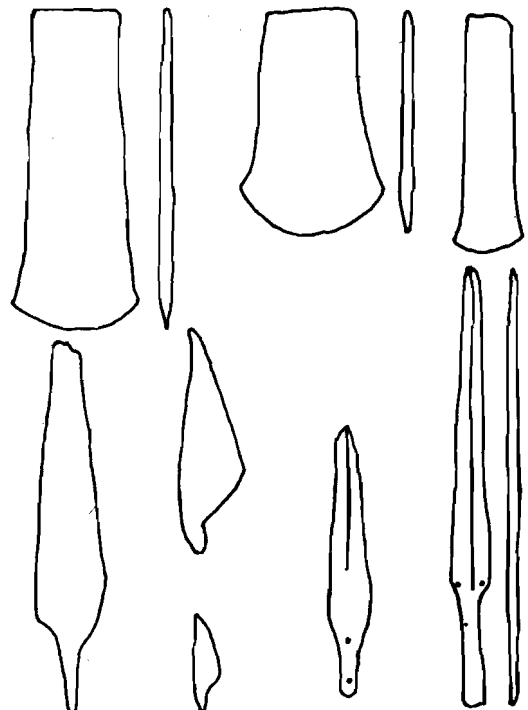
The tools and implements used by the Harappans also show a striking degree of uniformity in designs and in technique of production. They were using tools made of copper, bronze and stone. The basic tools types were flat axe, chisels, knives, spear heads and arrowheads for the copper and bronze implements. In the later stages of the Civilization they were also using daggers, knives and flat tangs. They were familiar with the techniques of casting bronze and copper. Stone tools were also in common use. They were produced on a large scale in factory sites like Sukkur in Sind and then sent to various urban centres. Only this could explain the uniformity in the tool types. Unlike the 'Early Harappan' period when there were various tool making traditions the 'Mature Harappans' concentrated on making long regular blades. They indicate a high level of competence and specialisation with little or no concern for beauty and innovation.



7. Hooks for Fishing



8. Stone-blade tools (Mohenjodaro)



9. Copper and Bronze tools used by the Harappans.

6.6.4 Arts and Crafts

Works of art give us an insight into how the society relates itself to its surroundings. They also give us an idea of how it views nature, human beings and divinity. In pre-modern societies it is difficult to separate arts and crafts. That is why we shall study them together.

Probably, the most famous art piece from the Harappan Civilization is the bronze dancing nude figure discovered in Mohenjodaro. With head drawn backwards, drooping eyes and the right arm on the hip and the left arm hanging down the figure is in a dancing stance. She is wearing a large number of bangles, and her hair is plaited in an elaborate fashion. It is considered a masterpiece of the Harappan art. The bronze figurines of a buffalo and a ram have beautifully caught the stance of the animals. The two little toy carts of bronze are also fairly well known objects. Although, one was discovered in Harappa and the other at Chanhudaro a distance of over 650 km.—they are identical in design.

The stone sculpture of a bearded head found in Mohenjodaro is another well known piece of art. The face is bearded with the upper lip shaved. The half closed eyes might indicate a state of meditation. Across the left shoulder is a cloak carved in relief with trefoil pattern. Some scholars believe that it is the bust of a priest.



10. Bronze dancing girl (Mohenjodaro)



11. Bearded man (Mohenjodaro)

Two small male torsos discovered in Harappa are sometimes believed to have belonged to later periods. The refined and wonderfully realistic modelling of the fleshy parts is extraordinary. However, the Harappans do not seem to have used stone or bronze for their artistic creations on a large scale. The findings of such works are rare.

Terracotta figurines have been found in large numbers from the Harappan settlements. They were used as toys or cult figures. A variety of birds and monkeys, dogs, sheep and cattle are represented in these forms along with humped and humpless bulls. A large number of male and female figurines have also been found. Various models of terracotta carts are remarkable for the vivacity of modelling. These models show that the bullock carts used in those times are ancestors of the actual bullock carts used in modern times.

The Harappans used remarkably beautiful beads made of such precious and semi-precious stones such as agate, turquoise, carnelian and steatite. The processes

of making these beads are clear from the finds of a workshop in Chanhudaro. In these processes the stone was first sawn into an oblong bar, then flaked into a cylindrical shape and polished. Finally it was bored either with chert drills or with bronze tubular drills. Gold and silver beads have also been found. The commonest material used for making beads was steatite.

The barrel shaped beads with trefoil pattern are typically associated with the Harappan culture. Carnelian beads are also quite common. In Mohenjodaro was also discovered a hoard of jewellery consisting of gold beads, fillets and other ornaments. Small dishes of silver too, have been found.

More than 2000 seals have been found from the Harappan settlements. They are considered 'the outstanding contribution of the Indus Civilization' to ancient craftsmanship. They were generally square in shape and made of steatite but some round seals have also been found. The designs on the seals include a wide range of animals associated with groups of signs in a semi-pictographic script. Some seals have only scripts carved on them and some others bear human and semi-human forms. Some seals show the use of various kinds of geometric patterns. The animal motifs used are the Indian bison, the Brahmani bull, rhinoceros, tiger and elephant. A series of composite animals are also shown. One such recurrent representation is that of a face of a man with trunk and tusks of an elephant, the horns of bull, the fore-part of a ram and the hind-quarters of a tiger. These kinds of seals might have been used for religious purpose. Seals could have also been used for exchange of goods between distant cities. The seal of a horned deity sitting in a yoga posture and surrounded by animals has been identified with the god Pashupati.

The artworks of the Harappans leave us a little disappointed on two counts; i) The finds are very limited in number and ii) they do not seem to have the variety of expression seen in the contemporary Civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Stone sculptures was rare and undeveloped compared to those fashioned by the Egyptians. The terracotta pieces also cannot compare with those of Mesopotamia in quality. It is possible that the Harappans were using less durable medium like textile designs and paintings for their artistic expression, which have not survived.

6.6.5 The Indus Script

The seals used by the Harappans carried some form of writing. This script is still a mystery to us because we cannot read it. So far the other forgotten scripts like those of ancient Egypt could be read again because scholars found some inscriptions written in the forgotten script followed by some of its forms in a known script. We have not discovered any bilingual inscription in Harappa so far. Thus, we do not know what language the Harappans spoke and what they wrote. Unfortunately, the inscriptions discovered so far are short, usually engraved on seals. This makes the task of decipherment all the more difficult. All we know is that they used ideograms and wrote from right to left. However, scholars are still struggling to unveil the mystery of the script. Once this is done it might reveal much more about the civilization.

6.6.6 Subsistence Pattern

The Harappans urbanism was based on agricultural production. During various excavations a large volume of information has emerged about the dietary habits of the Harappans. Apart from sheep and goat, humped cattle seems to have been domesticated. Bones of boars, buffaloes, elephants and camels have also been found from many settlements. We do not know as yet whether these animals had been domesticated or hunted wild. However, a representation of a caprisoned elephant on some seals indicates that this animal had been domesticated. Bones of fowls have also been found. Possibly, they had been domesticated. Bones of a large number of wild animals have been found. Among them are the bones of deer, rhinoceros, tortoise etc. Horse seems to have been unknown to the Harappans.

Two varieties of wheat are frequently found in Harappan sites. Barley has been frequently found. Other crops include dates and varieties of leguminous plants, such as peas. Besides these mustard and sesamum were also grown. At Lothal and Rangapur rice husk was found embedded in clay and pottery. We do not as yet know whether they represented variety of wild rice or rice domesticated and regularly cultivated. India has traditionally been famous for its cotton clothes. At Mohenjodaro

was found a fragment of a cotton cloth. This indicates that the Harappans had already mastered the art of growing cotton and wearing cloth.

The evidence of a furrowed field in Kalibangan indicates that the Harappans were using some sort of wooden plough. The pattern of crossed furrows widely spaced in one direction and closely spaced in another, is still followed in this area. The modern cultivator furrows his field in this pattern for sowing horse gram or sesamum in one direction and mustard in another. This was probably true of the Harappans also.

Thus, we find that the Harappan subsistence system was based on the exploitation of a fairly wide range of crops, domesticated animals and wild animals. This variety would account for the strength of the subsistence system. They were probably already growing two crops annually. They also grew two or more kind of crops simultaneously. This provided the strength to the economy to support the large population which lived in the cities and did not produce its own food.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Discuss the material characteristics of the Harappan Civilization in about 10 lines.

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- 2 Mark right (✓) or wrong (×) against the following statements:

- i) Great Bath is a brick built structure excavated at Harappa.
- ii) Great Granary is an important building discovered at Mohenjodaro.
- iii) The discovery of fire altars has been made at Lothal.
- iv) The Harappans used tools made of iron.
- v) The Harappan script has not yet been deciphered.

- 3 Fill in the blanks with the correct answers:

- i) The bronze dancing girl discovered at (Mohenjodaro/Harappa/Kalibangan) is considered a masterpiece of Harappan art.
- ii) At Lothal (rice/wheat/barley) was found embedded in clay.
- iii) Among the animals (elephant/camel/horse) seems to have been unknown to Harappans.
- iv) The evidence for cotton comes from (Harappa/Mohenjodaro/Kalibangan).

6.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you have studied about the geographical location and material characteristics of the Harappan sites. The uniformities in the geographical characteristics created similar subsistence patterns in the Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Ghaggar axis. However, there were other sites where the settlement pattern varied in accordance with the varying geographical features of these sites. The town planning of the Harappans was extremely efficient. The houses and drainage system of the

Harappan towns is indicative of the remarkable material achievements of the Harappans. Generally the Harappan pottery, tools and implements show a uniformity of tradition. The seals and beads of Harappans are beautiful works of craftsmanship but the stone sculpture and terracotta figurines cannot compete with those of contemporary Egypt and Mesopotamia in technical excellence. The subsistence system of the Harappans was based on the cultivation of a number of crops and domestication of animals. This gave strength to the economy to sustain the city population which did not produce its own food which had to be transported from nearby areas.

6.8 KEY WORDS

Artefacts : A thing made by human workmanship.

Chute : A passage for sending down dirty water.

Citadel : The fortress in the city.

Eastern Domain of the Harappans : Specifically refers to the Harappan sites in Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and U.P.

Excavation : The act of digging an ancient site.

Granary : The storehouse for grains.

Meander : Curve of a river, where it is flowing sluggishly with many twists and bends leading to deposition of silts.

Pictographic Script : The script which uses pictures as symbols.

Plateau : An extensive area of elevated land.

Terracotta : A composition of clay and sand used for making statues. It is baked in fire and is brownish red in colour.

6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1 Your answer should include the following:

The description of the geographical location and subsistence pattern of Harappa, the discussion of the geographical location of Mohenjodaro, Kalibangan, Lothal and Sutkagen-Dor. See Section 6.5 and Sub-secs. 6.5.1. to 6.5.5.

2 i) d ii) a iii) b iv) c

3 i) × ii) × iii) × iv) ✓

Check Your Progress 2

1 Your answer should include the following:

Discussion of town planning of Harappans, description of the pottery, tools and implements, arts and crafts, Indus script and subsistence pattern. See Section 6.6 and Sub-secs. 6.6.1 to 6.6.6.

2 i) × ii) × iii) × iv) × v) ✓

3 i) Mohenjodaro ii) rice iii) horse iv) Mohenjodaro

UNIT 7 NATURE OF CONTACTS

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Establishment of Trading Networks
- 7.3 Intra-Regional Contacts
 - 7.3.1 Cities
 - 7.3.2 Villages
- 7.4 Source of Raw Materials
- 7.5 Exchange System
- 7.6 Trade with the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia
 - 7.6.1 Archaeological Evidence
 - 7.6.2 Literary Evidence
- 7.7 Mode of Transport
- 7.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.9 Key Words
- 7.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain why the Harappans tried to establish links with the faraway lands,
- know about the nature of contact among the Harappan towns and the surrounding areas,
- learn about the trade and exchange activities of the Harappans with the contemporary West Asian Civilizations, and
- know about our sources of information on this nature of contact and exchange network.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The Harappan civilization was characterized by the presence of a large number of small and large towns. Apart from cities like Harappa and Mohenjodaro, even very small settlement like Allahdino (near Karachi) have yielded material characteristics of an urban economy. An urban economy is characterised by a vast network of relationships which transcend its physical space. You will see in this unit how the people of Harappa were in active interaction with other cities and towns which were located at a distance of hundreds of miles from Harappa.

This Unit goes on to explain the reasons why did the cities establish trading network and also the forms of the inter-regional trade. It also takes into account the sources of the raw materials and the extent of contact with the contemporary West Asian Civilization. Of course all this knowledge about the Harappan civilization is gained through various historical sources and they have been mentioned in the Unit.

7.2 ESTABLISHMENT OF TRADING NETWORKS

It is believed that active interaction among far flung areas did not exist in the pre-urban society. One might ask why did townsmen establish contacts with faraway lands and how do we know that they had contacts? In urban centres an important part of the population is engaged in non-food producing activities. These people perform the administrative, religious, trading and manufacturing functions. At the

same time if they are not producing their own food some one else has to do it for them. That is why towns are dependent on the surrounding countryside for food supplies.

What is important for us is the fact that the relationship between the city and the village was unequal. By developing as centres of administration or religion the cities attracted the wealth of the entire country. This wealth was siphoned off from the hinterland in the form of taxes, tributes, gifts or purchases of goods. In the Harappan society this wealth was controlled by the most powerful section of the urban society. At the same time the rich and well off sections in the city led a luxurious life. Their social superiority was reflected in the buildings constructed by them and the acquisition of luxury items which were not locally available. This indicates that a major reason for cities establishing contacts with faraway lands was to cater to the needs of the rich and powerful. This may be one of the factors behind the Harappans attempt to establish links with the faraway lands.

The area formed by Harappa, Bahawalpur and Mohenjodaro seems to have been the core region of the Harappan civilization. However, settlements showing overwhelming Harappan influence have been found in an area of approximately 1.8 million square km.

A pertinent question to ask here is that how some Harappan out-posts are found in such far flung areas as Shortughai in Afghanistan and Bhagatruv in Gujarat? The plausible answer seems to be economic inter-dependence and trade network between different regions. Differential access to basic resources was crucial in linking various regions of Indus Valley. These resources included agricultural products, minerals, timber, etc. and this could be achieved by establishing trade routes. Emerging in the fertile Indus-Hakra plains, the rich Harappans wanted possession of more and more luxury items. In quest of this they strengthened the ties that already existed with central Asia and Afghanistan. They also established settlements in places like Gujarat and the Gangetic Valley.

7.3 INTRA-REGIONAL CONTACTS

In the following sections we shall try to assess the nature of contact among the Harappan towns themselves and with other cities and societies of that period. Our information on such contact is based on the reports of objects found during the excavations of Harappan towns. Some of this information is substantiated by references found in the literary sources of the contemporary Mesopotamian civilization.

7.3.1 Cities

We could begin with the evidence of the existence of granaries in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. These large structures were meant for storing grains. As pointed out earlier urban centres depend on the villages for their foods. The presence of granaries indicates the attempt of the rulers to possess an assured source of food supply. Presumably food grains were brought from the surrounding villages and stored here. This in turn would be redistributed to the townsmen. Grains are a bulk commodity which are consumed every day. Vast quantities of grains would have to be collected and transported in bullock carts and boats. It would be difficult to haul up large quantities of food over a great distance. That is why it has been found that towns were usually located in the most fertile areas that were available in the region, and probably the grains were collected from the surrounding villages.

For example, Mohenjodaro was located in the Larkana district of Sind. Even in modern times this is the most fertile area of Sind. However, some other settlements sprang up on important trade routes or industrial sites. In such cases the location was determined not so much by the presence of fertile agricultural tracts as by possibilities of trade and exchange.

That is why, when scholars analyse the causes for the location of large cities they look for:

- the potentialities of the place for food-production, and
- its proximity to trade routes and mineral sources.

If we go by these considerations Harappa is very well located. The entire geographical space to its north-west has not yielded evidence of any other Harappan settlement. Even in the 19th century this area was largely inhabited by pastoral nomads. Some scholars are of the opinion that Harappa was located at a point which separated the zone of agricultural settlements to its south and a zone of pastoral nomads to its north-west. This way Harappa could exploit the resources of both the neighbouring communities. It has also been suggested that although Harappa did not have any advantage in terms of food production it grew into a large city because of its strategic location as a trading settlement. If we place Harappa in the centre and draw a circle around it covering an area of about 300 km. we can see that Harappa had a very advantageous location:

- i) Harappans would have access to the Hindukush and North-West Frontier. This meant that within a distance covered by about ten days of travelling Harappans had access to such precious stones as Turquoise and lapis lazuli which were brought through these routes.
- ii) They could get mineral salt from the salt range.
- iii) Tin and Copper were accessible to them from Rajasthan.
- iv) Probably, they could also exploit the sources of amethyst and gold in Kashmir.
- v) This three hundred km. circle would give them access to the point where all the five rivers of Punjab joined into a single stream. This means that the Harappans could control the river transport of all the five rivers of Punjab. River transportation was far easier in those times when concrete roads did not exist.
- vi) This could provide them access to timber from the mountains zones of Kashmir.

That is why it has been found that Harappa is located in a place which is crossed by many trade routes from West and East even in modern times.

The settlements at Mohenjodaro and Lothal also had their own logic in terms of location. Some scholars believe that the apparently religious nature of large structures in Mohenjodaro might indicate that it was a ritual centre. Whether it was a ritual centre or not, the rich people here were using gold, silver and all kinds of precious articles which were not locally available. Mohenjodaro was closer to the sea compared to Harappa. This would give them easier access to the Persian gulf and Mesopotamia which were probably the chief suppliers of silver. Similarly, Lothal was drawing resources from Southern Rajasthan and Deccan. They probably helped the Harappans procure gold from Karnataka, where contemporary neolithic sites have been discovered near the gold mines.

7.3.2 Villages

The villages supplied the essential food grains and other raw materials to the towns but what were the Harappan towns giving to the villages in return? We have few clues for an answer. One answer is that the rulers of the towns used force to collect grains—calling it tax which was to be given in return for administration. However, one important ingredient of this rural-urban relationship was the ability of the urban centres to collect a whole range of items that were not available locally and supply them to the rural hinterland.

One item of interest was the stone tools. People in almost all the Harappan towns and villages were using parallel-sided stone blades. These blades were made out of very good quality stone not found everywhere. It has been found that such stone was brought from sites like Sukkur in Sind. This hypothesis is proved by the fact that in sites like Rangapur in Gujarat people were using stone tools brought from distant areas during the urban phase of Harappa. Once the Harappan Civilization declined, the people in these areas started using tools made of local stones. Other such items would be copper and bronze. Copper is available only in certain pockets. However, almost all the Harappan sites have yielded copper-bronze tools. These tools also show a uniformity in design and execution in almost all the Harappan sites. This indicates that their production and distribution must have been handled by centralized decision making bodies. They could be the merchants or the administrators residing in the towns.

Apart from these items which were strategically important in terms of the economic activities, the Harappan settlements—big and small—have yielded objects of gold,

silver and very many precious and semi-precious stones. These metals and stones were procured by the merchants and rulers of the cities. With the inception of urbanism the volume of trade within the Harappan civilization increased in scale and variety to an unprecedented scale. Sites like Mohenjodaro reveal evidence of extensive bead-making. These products filtered down to the rich and powerful in the small villages and towns.

What emerges from the preceding discussion is:

- that the location of villages could be primarily determined by the availability of fertile soil and irrigation facilities.
- The location of towns will be determined by such additional factors as their proximity to mining districts or trade routes.
- Sometimes the factor of trade became so important that towns were established in inhospitable plains where agricultural yields were very poor. For example, Sutkagen-Dor on the Makran Coast was one such site. It is located in an inhospitable area and its prime activity was a trading post between the Harappans and the Mesopotamians.

Similarly we can look at the functions performed in other cities of the Harappan civilization:

- Balakot on the coast of Baluchistan and Chanhudaro in Sind were centres for shell-working and bangle making.
- Lothal and Chanhudaro were producing beads of carnelian, agate etc.
- Some unfinished beads of lapis lazuli in Chanhudaro might indicate that the Harappans imported precious stones from faraway places and then worked them before selling them.
- Mohenjodaro has yielded evidence for the presence of a large number of craft specialists like, stone workers, potters, copper and bronze workers, brick-makers, seal-cutters and bead-makers, etc.

7.4 SOURCE OF RAW MATERIALS

Excavations at different Harappan sites provide us with a large number of bangles, beads, potteries, various copper, bronze and stone objects. The range of objects discovered from the Harappan settlements indicates that they were using many kinds of metals and precious stones which would not be uniformly available in every region. The interesting thing is that even in very small Harappan sites precious stones and metal tools have been found. This indicates an intensive exchange network among the Harappans catering to the needs of the rich. What were the sources of the minerals and metals used by the Harappans?

- They acquired copper from the Khetri-mines of Rajasthan.
- The settlements of Jodhpura, Bagor and Ganeshwar in Central Rajasthan which are generally considered contemporary with the Harappans might have supplied copper ore to them.
- In Ganeshwar over 400 copper arrowheads, 50 fish-hooks and 58 copper axes were found.

At the same time the people in these settlements were subsisting with a combination of pastoral nomadism and hunting-gathering. They do not indicate influences from the Harappan civilization. This adds complexity to our problem of trade linkages. Archaeologists believe that the Harappans were importing copper tools from an area where people were still pastoralists and hunters. However, we do not know the mechanism through which these two groups, one representing an advanced urban civilization and the other representing a pastoral tribe, inter-acted. Probably the contacts were indirect.

The Harappans might have met some of their needs of copper from sources in Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Provinces also. Gold was most probably obtained from Kolar gold fields of Karnataka and Kashmir. Some neolithic sites have been located in this region that were contemporary with the Harappans. Gold washing

is reported from Jaipur and Sirohi in Rajasthan, Hazara, Kangra and Jhang in Punjab and along Kabul and Indus rivers.

Silver vessels are frequently found in the Harappan sites. However, there are no known sources for silver in this area. Silver might have been imported from Afghanistan and Iran. Probably, the Indus merchants also exchanged their goods with the Mesopotamians for silver. Lead may have come from Kashmir or Rajasthan. Some minor sources were located from Punjab and Baluchistan also.

The precious stone lapis-lazuli was available only in Badakshan in North-East Afghanistan. That the Harappans exploited this source is confirmed by the discovery of Harappan sites like Shortughai and Altyn-Depe in this area. Turquoise and Jade could have been obtained from central Asia alone. Agate, chalcedony and carnelian were from Saurashtra and Western India. Sea-shells, so very popular with the Harappans, must have come from the sea-coast of Gujarat and western India. Manda in Jammu is located at a point where the river Chenab becomes navigable. Probably good quality timber was acquired from the regions further up and sent to Central Indus Valley down the rivers. At Shortughai large quantity of lapis lazuli was discovered in association with the Harappan remains. This indicates that the Harappans were colonising far flung areas for the exploitation of mineral resources. This also indicates that trading and procurement of exotic materials was an important concern of the Harappans.

Trading seems to have been more an administrative activity than an exchange activity between traders, since establishing a colony at a distance of around 500 km would not be possible for a trader. It were the administrators of Harappa who were trying to bring under direct control resources of distant areas.

7.5 EXCHANGE SYSTEM

The Harappans had established an extensive network of inter-regional trade inside and outside the Indian sub-continent. However we do not know what were the actual mechanisms of exchange between the Harappans and the non-Harappans. Such a large area of interaction would inevitably involve communities having divergent life styles. In those times large areas of the country were inhabited by hunter-gatherers. Some other areas were occupied by pastoral nomads. Still others were just beginning cultivation. Compared to them Harappans represented an advanced stage of civilization. If the Harappans had to exploit some mineral sources from the regions inhabited by the hunter-gatherers or some other communities, how would they go about it? In some cases the Harappans established their settlements in those areas. But this would not be feasible in every case. Probably these non-Harappan communities would be given items which they considered valuable. In such cases the exchange might not have been a regular affair. Rather it would be determined by seasonal migrations and gatherings of these communities. The Harappans would send their merchants to the spots where such seasonal gatherings took place. The pastoral nomads too could have brought goods from distant regions, in course of their migrations. These kinds of exchange activities are known from modern examples in India. However, we know very little about the Harappan exchange system.

The Exchange System Among the Harappan Towns

The Harappans had made distinct attempts at regulating trade and exchange amongst themselves. Even the far flung Harappan sites have yielded uniform systems of weights and measures. The weights followed a binary system in the lower denominations: 1, 2, 4, 8, to 64, then going to 160 and then in decimal multiples of 16, 320, 640, 1600, 3200 etc. Made of chert, limestone, steatite, etc. they are generally cubical in shape. The measures of length were based upon a unit of foot of 37.6 cm and a unit of cubit of about 51.8 to 53.6 cms. Such uniform system of weights and measures indicates an attempt by the central authorities to regulate exchange among the Harappans themselves and possibly with the non-Harappans too.

Seals and sealings have been discovered in large numbers in the Harappan settlements. Seals and sealings are marks of ownership meant to guarantee the quality of the product being sent to faraway lands. That they were used for trade is confirmed

by the fact that many of the sealings bear impressions of cords and matting behind them. This indicates that the sealings bearing these impressions were originally stuck to bales of merchandise. At Lothal many sealings were discovered lying among the ashes in the ventilation shafts of warehouses. They must have been discarded and thrown away after the imported goods had been unpacked. The seals carried intaglio designs of various animals and a writing which has not been deciphered as yet. However, their use in long distance exchange seems certain.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 State whether the following statements are true or false.
 - a) The Harappan towns were self-sufficient.
 - b) The motive behind the colonisation of far flung areas by the Harappans was basically economic.
 - c) The location of large cities was decided only by the potentialities of food production.
 - d) River transportation was the cheaper and easier means of communication.
 - e) The tools found in different Harappan sites do not show any uniformity in design.
 - f) The Indus merchants exchanged their goods with the Mesopotamians for silver.
- 2 Fill in the blanks.
 - a) The Harappans obtained gold from.....(Kashmir/Rajasthan).
 - b) (Iron/Tin).....was not known to the Harappans.
 - c) Lapis Lazuli was discovered in large quantity at.....(Kalibangan/Shortughai).
 - d) Copper was obtained from.....(Rajasthan/Gujarat).
 - e) (Suktagen-Dor/Kalibangan).....was important as a trading port between the Harappans and the Mesopotamians.
- 3 Discuss about the exchange system among the Harappan towns. Answer in ten lines.

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7.6 TRADE WITH THE PERSIAN GULF AND MESOPOTAMIA

So far we have talked about the inter-regional exchange activities of the Harappans. In these activities Harappans were the dominant partners. Now we shall discuss the trade and exchange activities of Harappans with the contemporary West Asian civilizations. Mesopotamia was located thousands of miles away from the Harappan heartland. Yet these two civilizations had some kind of a trade linkage.

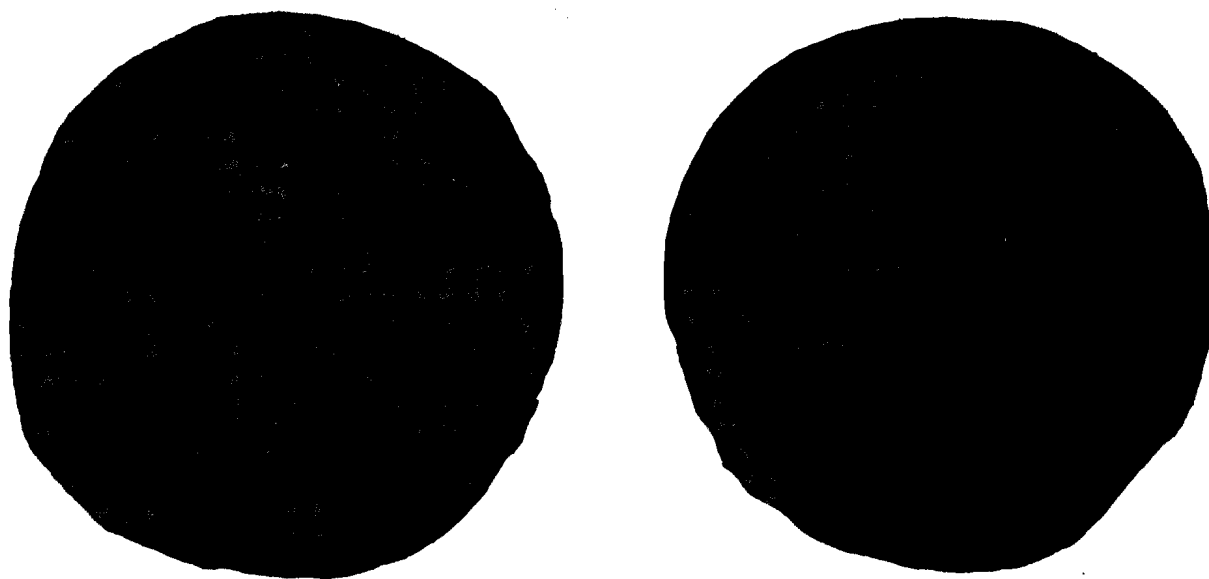
7.6.1 Archaeological Evidence for Contacts

Our information about the exchange comes from the finds of typical Harappan seals in Mesopotamia. About two dozen seals, either Harappan or made in imitation of

Harappan seals, have been found in the Mesopotamian cities like Susa, Ur, etc. Recently some of the Persian Gulf ancient sites like Failaka and Behrain have also yielded Harappan seals. In the Mesopotamian city of Nippur a seal has been found with Harappan script and a unicorn shown on it. Similarly, two square Indus seals with unicorn and Indus script were reported from the Mesopotamian city of Kish. In another city called Umma was found a sealing from the Indus Valley meaning that some goods had been received here from the Indus Valley.

In the settlement of Tell Asmar were found certain Harappan ceramics, etched Carmelian beads and kidney shaped bone inlay. All of these indicate trade linkage between Mesopotamia and the Harappans. A distinctive type of terracotta figurines generally found in the Indus Valley has been found in Nippur in Mesopotamia. These figurines depicting a male nude with obese stomach, animal like faces, stubby tails and shoulder holes for the attachment of movable arms are common at the Harappan sites. The finds of three similar figurines in Nippur are indicative of some Harappan influence. Again it has been found that the Indus dice types (1/2, 3/6, 4/5) were found in the Mesopotamian cities of Ur, Nippur and Tell Asmar. Apart from these beads having distinctive designs have been found in Mesopotamia and they seem to have been brought from the Indus Valley. Beads from Chanhudaro with single, double or triple circular designs closely resemble some beads discovered in Kish in Mesopotamia. Harappan weights have been found in Persian Gulf and Mesopotamian sites.

From the Harappan civilization the finds of objects of Mesopotamian origin are almost non-existent. In Mohenjodaro three cylinder seals of the Mesopotamian type have been found. However, they too, seem to have been made in some centre of Harappan Civilization. Some metal objects might have been derived from Mesopotamia. In the settlement of Lothal was found a circular button seal. This seal has been found in large numbers in the excavations at the port at Behrain. These seals seem to have originated in the Persian Gulf ports. Also bun shaped copper ingots have been found in Lothal. These are similar to the ones found in the Persian Gulf islands and Susa. Given the scarcity of material objects which could show contacts between the Harappans and the Mesopotamians, some scholars have questioned the notion of direct trade exchange between these civilizations. It is believed that the Harappans might have taken their wares to the settlements in the Persian Gulf. Some of these were further transported to Mesopotamian towns by the merchants of Persian Gulf ports like Behrain.



12. Seal of Persian Gulf Type : Lothal

7.6.2 Literary Evidence for Exchange

In Mesopotamia some ancient writings have been discovered which give us an idea of their trade linkages with the Harappan Civilization. The famous king Sargon of Akkad (C. 2350 B.C.) in Mesopotamia boasts that the ships of Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha were moored at his capital. Scholars have generally identified Meluhha with the coastal towns of the Harappans or the region of the river Indus. Some scholars

have suggested that Magan referred to the Makran coast. Some other documents used by the merchants of the city of Ur have also come down to us. They indicate that the merchants of Ur imported copper, carnelian, ivory, shell, lapis lazuli, pearls and ebony from Meluhha. All these objects seem to have been available in plenty in the Harappan sites.

In some cases, like copper, we are not aware of any major sources of supply to the Harappans. However, we should remember that the Harappans were exploiting a very large geographical zone extending upto Central Asia. They might have captured the trading networks that had existed in Central Asia and Afghanistan in the 'Early Harappan' period. The early Mesopotamian literature also refers to a community of merchants from Meluhha living in Mesopotamia. In another instance written documents from Mesopotamia refer to an official interpreter of the Meluhhan language. All these examples indicate that the links between the Harappans and the Mesopotamians were not indirect. Given the distance between these societies we cannot expect regular interaction. However, the relations were fairly close for the Mesopotamian kings to boast about the ships from Meluhha coming to their ports.

The absence of Mesopotamian goods in Harappa can be explained by the fact that traditionally the Mesopotamians exported items like garments, wool, perfumed oil and leather products. All these items are perishable and as such they have not left any trace. Silver might have been one of the items of export. Silver was not available in any known Harappan source. However, they were using it in large quantities. This could be an import from Mesopotamia.

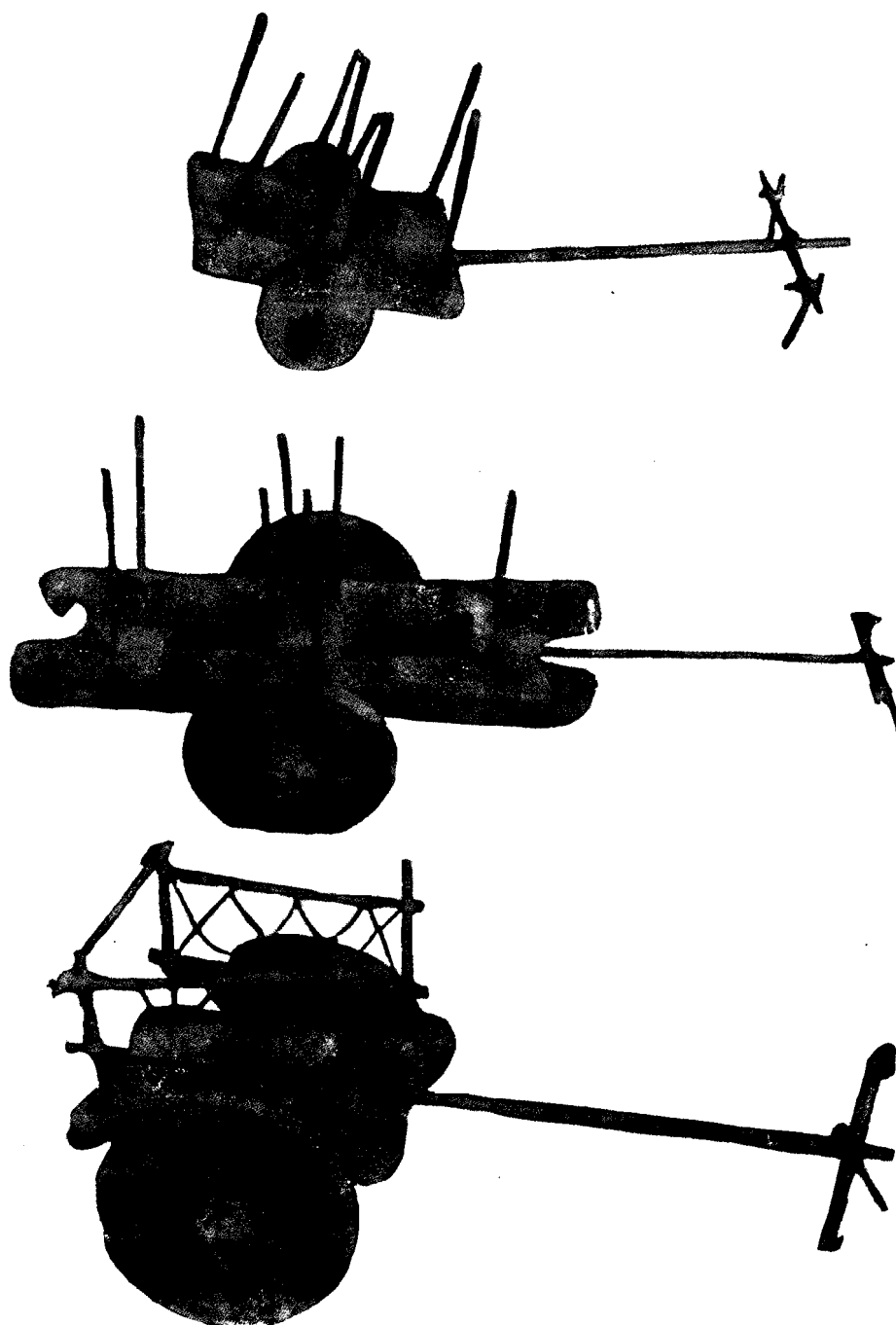
7.7 MODE OF TRANSPORT

The discussion about the nature of contact and exchange brings in the question of transportation. Many representations of ships and boats are found on seals in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. At Lothal was found a terracotta model of a ship with a stick impressed socket for the mast and eyeholes for fixing rigging. At Lothal was also discovered a brick basin 219 by 37 metres in length, with brick walls of 4.5 metres in height. The excavator believed that it was a dockyard. Apart from this site the seashore of the Arabian sea seems to have been dotted with many sea-ports. Places like Rangapur, Somnath and Balakot would have functioned as outlets for the Harappans. Even in the inhospitable Makran coast Harappan sites like Sutkagen-Dor and Sutkakoh have been discovered. The primary reason for their location in those inhospitable tracts was that they were safe from the dangerous monsoon storms and currents hitting the sea-coast in Western India and Sind. In the monsoon months they could function as outlets for the Harappans. Sutkagen-Dor is located on the borders of present day Pakistan and Iran. It is likely that even in the Iranian side there were some Harappan settlements. They have not been explored so far. But this kind of extension along the sea-coast would provide the Harappan ships points of anchorage right upto the Persian Gulf.

The inland transport was done with bullock carts. Many terracotta models of bullock carts have been found in Harappan settlements. In Harappa was found a bronze model of a cart with a seated driver and also models of little carts which are very similar to the modern 'Ikka' used in Punjab. For longer journey through wooded country, caravans of pack-oxen would be the chief means of transport. In historical times a large number of goods were transported by pastoral nomadic communities. Possibly the Harappans also engaged in similar practices. However, in those times river systems would have been the channels of transportation because they were cheaper and safer.



13. Representation of a ship on terracota



14. Toy carts

Check Your Progress 2 .

- 1 State whether the following statements are true or false.
 - a) The literary sources of the contemporary Mesopotamian civilization do not mention any contact with the Harappan civilization.
 - b) The discovery of Harappan seals in the Mesopotamian cities proves the contact between the Harappan and the Mesopotamian civilizations.
 - c) The discovery of a dockyard at Lothal refers to the maritime trade of the Harappans.
 - d) Bullock cart was not known to the Harappans as means of transport.
- 2 Mark (✓) the right answer.
 - i. What were exported from the Harappan cities to Mesopotamia?
 - a) Garments, Perfumed oil, leather products.
 - b) Silver, gold, bronze
 - c) Copper, ivory, lapis lazuli.

- ii. Some of the important ports of the Harappan period were:
 - a) Dilmun, Magan, Meluhha
 - b) Kalibangan, Banwali, Lothal
 - c) Ur, Nippur, Chanhudaro
 - iii. Some important Mesopotamian sites where the Harappan seals have been found are:
 - a) Susa, Ur, Kish
 - b) Tell Armar, Behrain, Akkad
 - c) Dilmun, Magan, Meluhha.
- 3 Write in five sentences on the transportation system of the Harappans.

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7.8 LET US SUM UP

We have seen from the above discussion that the Harappan Civilization seems to have carried a brisk internal trade. Internal trade would mean exchange activities carried over an area of 1.3 million square km. This exchange activity is clear from the fact that even very small Harappan sites like Allahdino have yielded seals, sealings, many kinds of beads of semi-precious stones and metal utensils. Most of these objects were imported from outside. The location of Harappan settlement along navigable waterways and traditional land routes also indicates deep involvement of the Harappans in exchange activities. Their linkages with the contemporary West Asian cultures is also well documented now. No wonder we call them a city-centred community.

7.9 KEY WORDS

Bead : A small piece of stone pierced in the middle for stringing.

Hinterland : A region lying inland from a port of centre of influence.

Mesopotamia : Ancient name of Iraq.

Region : An area having specific characteristics of landscape which differentiate it from other areas.

7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 a) False b) True c) False d) True e) False f) True
- 2 a) Kashmir b) Iron c) Shortughai d) Rajasthan e) Sutkagen-Dor
- 3 Your answer should include the uniform systems of weights and measures, binary system of weight, seals and sealings on the products to ensure quality and ownership etc. See Section 7.5.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 a) False b) True c) True d) False
- 2 i) c ii) a iii) a
- 3 Your answer should include archaeological evidence in support of transportation system, river transport, inland transport. See Section 7.7

UNIT 8 SOCIETY AND RELIGION

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Society
 - 8.2.1 Dress Styles
 - 8.2.2 Food Habits
 - 8.2.3 Language and Script
 - 8.2.4 Warfare
 - 8.2.5 Main Crafts/Occupations
- 8.3 Who Ruled Them?
- 8.4 Religion and Religious Practices
 - 8.4.1 The Places of Worship
 - 8.4.2 Objects of Worship
 - 8.4.3 The Burial of the Dead
- 8.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.6 Key Words
- 8.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand the different aspects of society and religious practices of the Harappan people. Particularly you will be able to:

- know about their dresses and food habits
- discuss the controversy about their script and language
- list their main occupations
- understand the nature of the ruling classes
- recall their religious practices and prominent gods and
- know about their burial practices.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier Units of this Block you studied some significant features of Harappan Civilization. In this Unit we will discuss the society and religion of the Harappans.

One might ask what the Harappans looked like? Did they wear clothes of the same kind as we do? What did they read and write? What kinds of jobs did the townsfolk do? What language did they speak? What food did they eat? Did they have cups of tea with chips of potato? Did they play games and did they fight? Who ruled over them? What were their temples and gods like? Were they like us?

These are some very simple questions which the scholars find difficult to answer. This is because of the nature of sources available for knowing about that period. The main sources available are in the form of archaeological findings excavated from different sites.

Answers to many of the questions related to the realm of ideas and feelings are difficult to provide with our present knowledge about this civilization. Even an innocuous question like whether a Harappan was feeling a sense of pleasure while making a carnelian bead cannot be answered. In this Unit we will try to derive some answers from silent objects lying abandoned for thousands of years.

8.2 SOCIETY

The archaeological finds from Harappan sites help us in reconstructing the society of the period. We get an idea about their dress styles and food habits. We also get

information about the trade and crafts and various social groups. Let us first examine the external appearance and dresses of the Harappans.

8.2.1 Dress Styles

What did the Harappans look like? The only way of finding out an answer for this would be examining the terracotta figurines and stone sculptures surviving from that period. Another way of knowing would be examining the skeletal remains found in some of the Harappan settlements.

The study of the skeletal types shows that the Harappans looked like the present day north Indians. Their faces, complexion and height were more or less similar to the present day people living in those areas. But the similarities end here. They did not wear the shirts and trousers or Salwar-Kameez like the modern men and women. We can have some idea about their dresses and fashions by a study of contemporary sculptures and terracotta figurines. Men are mostly shown wearing a dress which would be wrapped round the lower half of the body with one end worn over the left shoulder and under the right arm—like the modern saree. The other dress was a kilt and a shirt worn by both men and women. The men arranged their hair in various ways sometimes making buns and using headbands. The men used many more ornaments than the modern Indians. They would be wearing ring, bracelets and ornaments round their neck and hands. Growing beard was fashionable but they would shave their moustaches. Women seem to have used ornaments on their waist. Women wore a large number of necklaces. Bangles too were in fashion and of course there was no end to the number of ways in which hair was arranged. Men and women alike had long hair. We know that they used cotton clothes also that in one sculpture the cloth was shown as having trefoil pattern and red colours. However, for all his fashionableness if we saw a man from Harappa walk on the road—to our eyes he will probably resemble a mendicant more than anyone else.



15. Jewellery of Gold and some precious stone

8.2.2 Food Habits

What did they eat? Again, we know very little, the Harappans of Sind and Punjab ate wheat and barley as their staple food. Those who stayed in towns of Rajasthan had to be content with barley only. The Harappans of Gujarat in places like Rangpur and Surkotda preferred rice and millet. Let us see where they got their supply of protein and fat from.

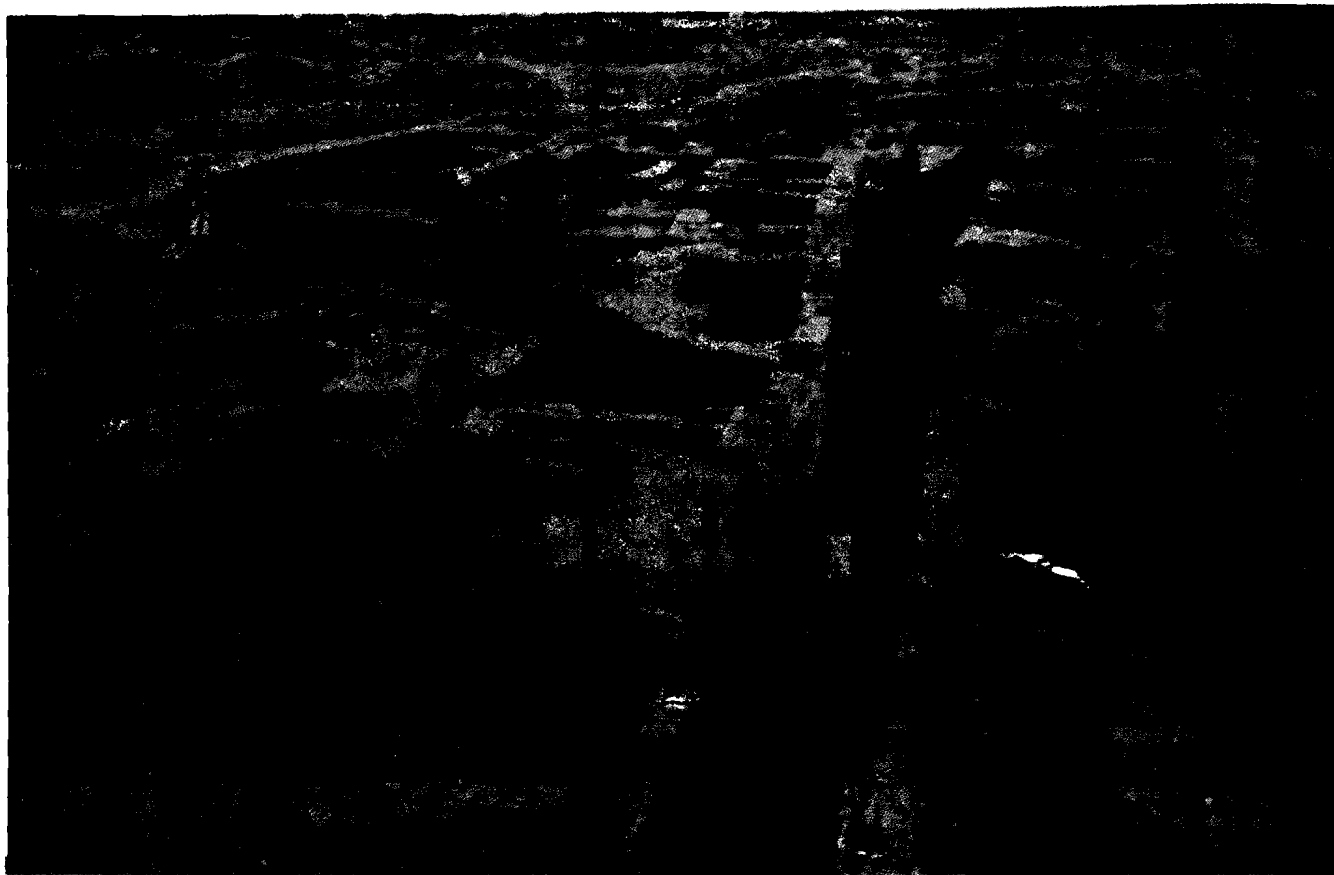
They got their supply of fat and oil from sesame seeds, mustard and possibly Ghee. We do not know whether they were familiar with sugarcane to supply them sugar. They might have used honey to sweeten their food. Seeds of jujube and dates found in the Harappan sites indicate their preference for these fruits. It is likely that they also ate bananas, pomegranates, melons, lemons, figs and of course mangoes. They

seem to have consumed a whole range of wild nuts and fruits but it is difficult to identify them. They were eating peas too. Apart from this the Harappans seem to have relished non-vegetarian food. Bones of deer, bears, sheep and goats have been frequently found in the Harappan settlements. Fish, milk and curd too would be known to them. However, they had neither tea nor potato-chips. Could you yourself find out the reason for this?

8.2.3 Language and Script

What language did they speak and what did they read and write is again not very clear to us. We have discovered the written script of the Harappans. As pointed out earlier, we have not deciphered it as yet. Some scholars believe that the language written there is ancestral to the Dravidian group of languages like Tamil. Some other writers would like to think that it was ancestral to an Aryan language like Sanskrit.

However, no one has proved his case beyond doubt. However, one noticeable thing about their script is that it did not change all through the life of the Harappan Civilization. All the other ancient scripts have showed distinct changes over a period of time. This indicates that the Harappan script was not in common use. Perhaps a very small section of privileged scribes had a monopoly over the written word. About what they learnt and how they learnt—we have no answers. Whether they had some kind of school for teaching as was the case in contemporary Mesopotamia is not known to us.



16. Northern half of Kalibangan citadel

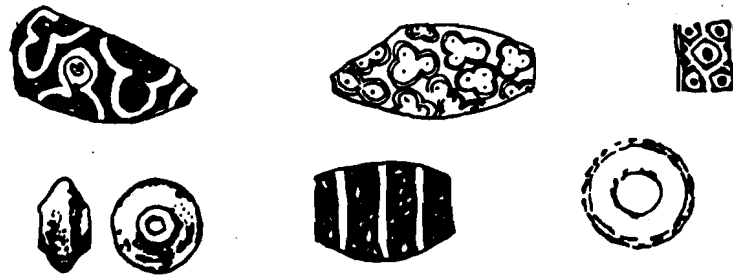
8.2.4 Warfare

Did they play and did they fight? We know that they played dice. But beyond that we again draw a blank. They did fight—and there is enough evidence for it—possibly because the archeologists who were digging up various Harappan sites were looking for evidences of war and not of sport. One important indicator of course is that at the time of the emergence of the Harappan Civilization many 'Early Harappan' sites like Kot Diji and Kalibangan were burnt down. However an accidental fire could destroy large towns, but it is more likely that some of the settlements were burnt down by victorious human groups. Then there is the evidence of some skeletons lying scattered in the streets of Mohenjodaro. Human societies from times immemorial have disposed off the bodies of their dead in some ordered fashion. It is natural that the Harappans would not leave their dead to rot in the streets. So, obviously some

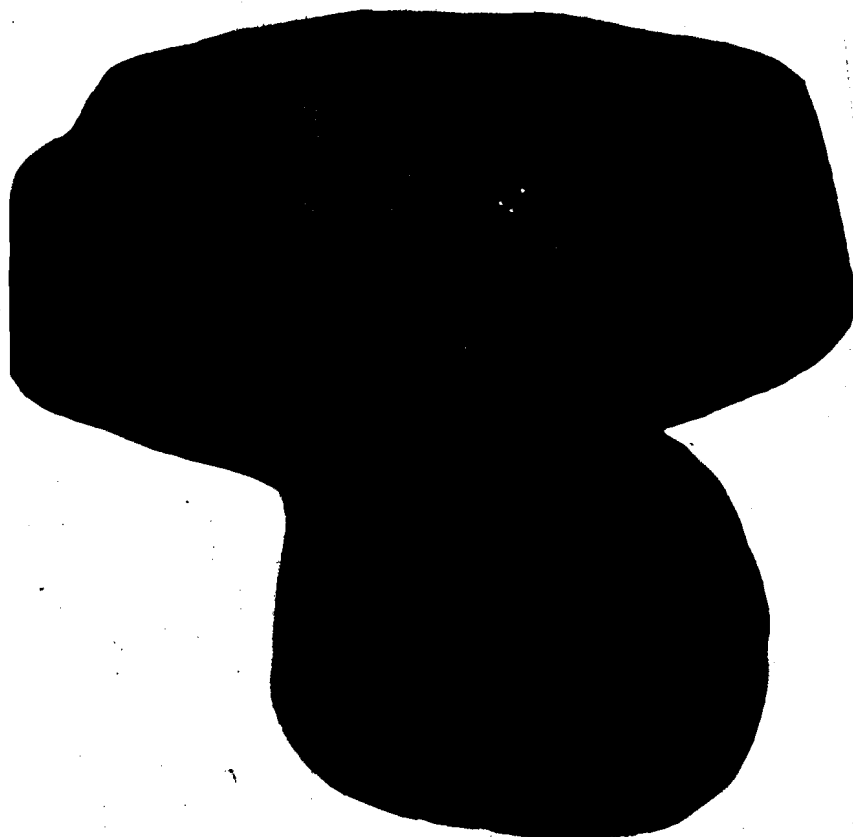
extraordinary conflict is indicated when the Harappans did not get an opportunity to bury their dead. The presence of citadels and fortification around many Harappan towns also indicates a need for protection against outsiders. Some of the protection walls might have been bunds for protection against floods. But given the opulence of the Harappan townships in contrast to the surrounding rural communities it is likely that the Harappans wanted to protect their wealth and life by fortifying their settlements. Many copper and bronze weapons have also been reported.

8.2.5 Main Crafts

What did the Harappans do for a living? We are on surer grounds in answering this question. This is because studies of pre-modern civilized societies show that most of the people in those societies were engaged in agriculture. However, quite a few Harappan townsmen were engaged in various other kinds of activities. Bead making was one of the favourite activities of the Harappans. In settlements like Mohenjodaro, Chanhudaro and Lothal a fairly large number of Harappans were engaged in this work. Since a variety of stones like Carnelian, Lapis Lazul, Agate and Jasper were used for making beads it is likely that there were specialised bead makers for each type of stone. Some other Harappans specialized in making stone tools. Apart from them groups of potters, copper and bronze workers, stone workers, builders of houses, brick makers and seal-cutters must have lived in Harappan towns. When we talk about the Harappan Civilization, we are basically referring to seals, bricks, pots and other such objects surviving from those times. These objects presuppose the existence of their makers.



17. Beads of some precious stones from Harappan sites



18. Furnace used for bead-manufacture

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Which of the following statements is right (✓) and which is wrong (×).
 - i) The Harappan script underwent a number of changes during the period this civilization survived
 - ii) The Harappans were strict vegetarians
 - iii) Generally the Harappan towns were fortified
 - iv) The Harappan men were fond of wearing ornaments.
- 2 Fill in the empty spaces given in the following sentences.
 - i) We get the information about the dresses and fashions of Harappan people through their
 - ii) was used to make Harappan metallic tools.
 - iii) The staple food of the Harappans was in Rajasthan, in Sind and Punjab and in Gujarat.
 - iv) A large number of beads found in Harappan settlements are made of
- 3 Write five lines on Harappan Script.

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8.3 WHO RULED THEM?

At the top of the pyramid of the Harappan society were three invisible categories of people—the administrators, the traders and the priests. Their presence can be presumed on the basis of an understanding of the problems of organisation. The rise of Civilization is associated with the emergence of a centralized decision-making system called the State. In the Harappan civilization we can perceive the presence of a decision-making authority for running the municipal system:

- The construction and maintenance of elaborate drainage system and streets would require a municipal authority in the cities.
- Similarly, the granaries indicate the presence of an authority which would collect food grains from the surrounding hinterland and redistribute it among the citizens.
- As pointed out earlier, the tools, weapons, bricks etc. show a remarkable uniformity of design. Some of the tools and weapons seem to have been mass-produced in one place and then distributed to various cities and settlements. The organisation of production and distribution of these objects over an area covering thousands of kms. would give tremendous power to those who decided how much to produce and where to send the products. If these people were to stop the supply of goods to a particular town, that town would be starved of tools and implements.
- The sheer range and volume of products consumed by the residents of the larger cities indicate that some kind of a ruling class resided in them. Many of the objects were rarities brought from faraway lands. The possession of such precious stones or metals would give immense prestige to owners vis-a-vis the rest of the population.
- Similarly, the larger size of the cities did not simply indicate that a larger number of people lived there but also the fact that they contained many monumental structures like temples, palaces etc. The people who lived in these structures exercised political or economic or religious authority. No wonder, the seals which are considered marks of authority of traders, priests or administrators are found in largest numbers in Mohenjodaro where the largest number of monumental structures have also been found.

However, we are not suggesting that Mohenjodaro functioned as the Capital of the Harappan Civilization. It is possible that the Harappan Civilization consisted of two or even five independent political units. All we are suggesting is that the city had

emerged as the Centre of politico-economic power. We do not know who the rulers of the Harappans were. They may have been kings, priests or traders. However, we know that in many pre-modern societies the economic, religious and administrative spheres are not clearly demarcated. This means that the same person could be the head priest, king and the wealthiest merchant. But all these evidences indicate the presence of a ruling authority. What was the form of this authority is not yet clear to us.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 On what basis can we say that Harappan was an Urban Civilization?

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2. A number of things found in Harappan excavations indicate the presence of civic and political authority. What are these?

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8.4 RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Who did the Harappans worship? This is one question about which there has been considerable discussion among scholars. The mute survivors of the Harappan past do not tell us anything. So, we have to fit in our logic and our fancies to understand their religious beliefs. One major problem is that without written information it is difficult to differentiate their sacred and secular activities. Thus, it seems that any or every find from Harappa might have a sacred content. However, we shall try to understand the religious beliefs of the Harappans with the help of modern parallels.

8.4.1 The Places of Worship

A number of large buildings in the citadel and the lower town at Mohenjodaro are believed to have been temples of gods. This view is supported by the fact that most of the large stone sculptures were found in these buildings.

In the lower city at Mohenjodaro a large building has been discovered. This building has a monumental entrance and a double stairway leading to a raised platform on which was found a stone sculpture 16½ inches high. It is a seated man with hands on knees. It has a bearded face with a fillet passing over a receding forehead and hanging down in two strands at the back. Another stone statue was discovered in the same building. This is why scholars have identified this building with a temple.

In Mohenjodaro several structures are reported from the citadel mound which seem to have had some ritual significance. Among them 'The Great Bath' is the most famous. Such elaborate bathing arrangements were made in very sacred ritual spots in the subsequent historical phases in India. So, it is likely that 'Great Bath' was not simply a swimming pool but that it had a great ritual significance.

Near the 'Great Bath' was found another large structure (230 × 78 feet) which has been identified as the residence of some high priest or college of priests. Similarly, an oblong assembly hall has also been reported from the citadel area. To the west of this structure was found a complex of rooms in one of which was discovered a seated male statue. This too has been identified as a part of some religious structure. These ritual structures provide us with a glimpse of the religious practices of the people in Mohenjodaro. We can presume that some of the ritual performances took place in the large temple like structure.

8.4.2 Objects of Worship

The evidence for the objects of worship comes from the study of Harappan seals and terracotta figurines. Amongst the evidences that come from the seals, the most famous is a deity who has been identified as proto-Siva. On a series of seals a deity wearing a buffalo-horned head-dress is shown sitting in a yogic posture. The deity is surrounded by animals like goats, elephants, tiger and antelope. Marshall identified him with god Pasupati (Lord of Beasts). In several instances he has a sprouting plant emerging between his horns. In another case a deity with horns and flowing hair is standing nude between the branches of a Pipal tree. A worshipper is kneeling in front of it. Behind the worshipper is a man-faced goat and below are seven other human figures. They have long pigtailed and tall head-dresses. In one seal are shown snakes accompanying the yogic figure. Each of the features associated with the horned deity are attributes of Siva of later Indian history. Moreover in some Harappan settlements the phallic emblem of Siva (Lingam) has been found. All these evidences have led scholars to believe that Siva was the most important male god of the Harappans. Perhaps the temples were dedicated to the same god.

i. Mother Goddess

The Harappan settlements have yielded a very large number of terracotta figurines. Among them are the representations of females adorned with a wide girdle, loin cloth and necklaces. They wear a fan-shaped head dress. Sometimes they are shown with an infant. The general notion of fertility is indicated by many representations of pregnancy. These evidences indicate the prevalence of cults of fertility and mother goddess worship.

ii. Tree Spirits

The Harappans also seem to have worshipped tree spirits. Several seals depict the Pipal tree. In many cases a figure is shown looking through the branches. Scholars believe that this represents the tree-spirit. In many cases worshippers are shown standing in front of the tree. In many other cases a tiger or some other animal is shown in front of the tree. In one case seven human figures are shown standing in front of it, with a horned figure standing in it. As discussed earlier the horned figure probably is Siva. The Pipal tree has been worshipped in India for ages and in many cases the Pipal tree and Siva are worshipped together. The seven figures have sometimes been identified with the seven great sages or seven mothers of the Indian mythology.

iii. Some Mythical Heroes

Some other human figures which seem to have a religious significance are those found on seals and amulets. Human figures with horns on the head and long tails are frequently shown on the seals. Sometimes, they have hoofs of cattle and hind legs. Some other seals remind us of Mesopotamian mythology.

For example, a man grappling with a pair of tigers immediately brings to mind a brave warrior called Gilgamesh who is said to have killed two tigers.

iv. Animal Worship

A large number of animals also seem to have been worshipped. Again, our information comes from their representation on seals and sealings and in terracotta. A seal has been reported from Chanhudaro depicting a bull-bison with erect penis, fecundating a supine human figure. A plant is sprouting from the head of the human figure. This obviously is indicative of some fertility cult. The Brahmani bull with its heavy dewlap is frequently represented on the seals. It is possible that the present day reverence for bulls and cows had its beginnings in the Harappan Civilization.

v. Mythical Beasts

Many composite animals are depicted in the seals. There are animal representations of creatures with the foreparts of humans and the hind-quarters of tigers. Similarly, composite creatures combining various portions of rams, bulls and elephants are a frequent occurrence. They obviously represented objects of worship. The conception of composite creatures like 'Narasimha' was very much a part of the mythology of the later Indian tradition. One important animal frequently represented on the Harappan seals is the unicorn. This is a horse-like beast with a horn issuing from the middle of its head. In front of the animal occurs a curious object which is not shown in association with any other animal. It consists of a bowl on a central post carrying a cage like object. We do not know its function—it has been taken for a sacred manger or an incense holder. In

another seal impression, a 'unicorn' is shown being carried in a procession between two other objects, one of which was similar to the one discussed above. Obviously the 'unicorn' was a mythical animal, since there is no such real beast. It is likely to have been a cult object.

The Harappans at Kalibangan and Lothal seem to have followed different religious practices. At Kalibangan in the citadel were found a series of raised brick platforms crowned with 'fire altars' i.e., a series of brick-lined pits containing ash and animal bones. This area also had a well and bathing places. This complex seems to have represented some kind of ritual centre where animal sacrifice, ritual ablution and some sort of fire rituals were performed. Many houses in the lower town also contained a room having 'fire altars'. Several other 'fire' altars are also reported. At Lothal too, fire altars have been found. These evidences are very important because:

- a) they show that the Harappans staying in different geographical areas followed different religious practices, and
- b) the fire ritual was central to the Vedic religion.

The Vedic Aryans are believed to have been a different set of people. The evidence from Kalibangan might indicate that the Aryans adopted the religious practices of the Harappans when they came and settled down in these areas.

8.4.3 The Burial of the Dead

Disposal of the dead has been an important religious activity of the human groups. This is because the attitude towards the dead is linked up with the human beliefs regarding this life and life after death. The Harappan civilization has not yielded any monuments for the dead which could equal the pyramids of Egypt or the Royal cemetery of the Mesopotamian city of Ur, in its grandeur. However, we have certain evidences about the burial practices of the Harappans.

In Harappa many graves have been discovered. Dead bodies were generally placed in a north-south orientation. Bodies were laid on their back. A large number of earthen pots were placed in the grave. In some cases the dead were buried with ornaments like shell bangles, necklace, and an ear ring. In some cases copper mirrors, mother of pearl shells, antimony sticks etc. were kept in the grave. A number of graves were constructed with bricks. A coffin burial has been found at Harappa. At Kalibangan some other kinds of burial practices were encountered. Small circular pits containing large urns and accompanied by pottery have been found. But they did not have any skeletal remains. Some other burial pits with collected bones have also been found. From Lothal some examples of pairs of skeletons with a male and a female in each case buried together.

These practices show that the disposal of the dead among the Harappans was different from the one followed subsequently. In the historical phases the predominant system seems to have been cremation. At the same time the careful placement of bodies provided with ornaments and toiletries is indicative of some belief in life after death. What that belief was is unknown to us.

A study of the various kinds of objects found in excavations shows that different regions of the Harappan civilization followed different kinds of religious practices. Fire worship was prevalent in Kalibangan and Lothal but unknown in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Ritual bathing evidenced at Mohenjodaro might have been absent in Harappa. The burial practices show wide variation ranging from extended inhumation to double burials and pot burials. Finds in Kalibangan also show that different kinds of burial practices were being followed in the same settlement. This kind of diversity of religious beliefs and practices even in the same settlement reflects the complex nature of the urban centres. Unlike tribal societies where every member of the tribe follows similar kinds of religious practices, the urban centres are characterised by the presence of people following different kinds of religious practices. This apparently means that urban centres were formed by the political and economic integration of varied social groups. Also, an urban centre means the presence of traders from different regions with their own religious practices. These groups retained their social mores and religious customs but lost their political and economic independence.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 Which of the Harappan religious structures indicate the prevalence of some collective worship or rituals?

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- 2 Which of the following statements are correct?
 - i. Siva seems to be the most important Harappan God
 - ii. The female deities were absent in Harappan religious objects
 - iii. Trees also seem to be worshipped by Harappans
 - iv. No animals were worshipped by the Harappans
 - 3 Do we get any evidence of fire worship from Harappan finds?

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 - 4 What significant points emerge from the study of burial practices of Harappan people?

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8.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed the religious and social aspects related to the life pattern of Harappans.

The main dresses of Harappans were a big unsewn cloth like modern day saree and was wrapped on the body. The kit and shirt were other dresses worn by men & women alike. Men and women both were fond of ornaments. Their food included a large variety of items depending on the inhabited areas. The main items included rice, barley, millet and wheat. A number of fruits, vegetables and non-vegetarian items were also used. We hope you found the answer to the question raised in Section 8.2.2. Well if not, it is because tea and potato were not grown in the region at that time.

The Harappan script is still a mystery for the archaeologists and linguists. It has not been deciphered yet.

Fortification of their settlements and weapons found indicate that they were often engaged in fights.

Pottery, metal work, bead making and a number of crafts were practiced by the Harappans. This indicates the presence of artisans and urban labour force.

The society seems to have been divided into classes. There are indications of the presence of some kind of a political structure. Administrators, priests and traders alongwith large number of workmen seem to constitute the society in towns.

Some large structures indicate the prevalence of some collective worship or rituals. A number of gods, goddesses and objects seems to have been worshipped. The prominent were mother goddess, Siva and a number of trees and animals. Some composite mythical beasts also seem to have some place in religious practices.

The most prevalent system for disposing the dead seems burial rather than cremation. A number of ornaments and other objects are also found in the burial pits. All these give us, if not a total but a nearer view of the Harappan society.

8.6 KEY WORDS

Fertility Cult : A system of worship in which the reproductive aspects of nature and mankind are emphasised. The worship is expected to ensure the production of abundant crops or children.

Fire Altars : Brick-lined pits found in Kalibangan. They contained ash and animal bones. In many societies fire is worshipped. In the Vedic society similar kinds of pits were dug for lighting fire and worshipping it.

Royal Cemetery of Ur : A cemetery discovered in the Mesopotamian city of Ur belonging to the third millennium B.C. This cemetery contained the graves of many kings.

Script : System or style of writing.

Unicorn : A mythical animal having a body of a horse and one straight horn.

8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 i) × ii) × iii) ✓ iv) ✓
- 2 i) Terracotta human figures ii) Copper iii) Barley, Wheat and barley, rice and millet iv) Stone.
- 3 Your answer should include which present language seems to have descended from Harappan script, the changes it underwent and whether we are able to read it or not.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Your answer should include things like large number of brick structures spread in a big area, a number of craft products, drainage system etc. Also see section 8.3.
- 2 Your answer should include things like well planned towns, big houses, presence of granaries their management and other such things. Read Section 8.3 again.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 Big temple like structures with a number of sculptures, common baths, assembly halls, structures with a number of fire pits, etc. Read Section 8.4 and Sub-sec. 8.4.1
- 2 i) ✓ ii) × iii) ✓ iv) ×
- 3 In Harappan settlements like Kalibangan and Lothal a number of findings indicate to the presence of fire worship such as fire altars, in apparently public worship places and even houses. See sub-section 8.4.2 last paragraph.
- 4 The most significant point is that burying the dead was accompanied by some rituals. It appears that the Harappans believed in some sort of life after death because a number of items of every day use or ornaments are also placed alongside the dead. Some times it is paired burial one male and one female. In some cases urns containing bones are also buried.

UNIT 9 DIFFUSION AND DECLINE

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Decline of Harappa: The Archaeological Evidence
- 9.3 Theories of Sudden Decline
 - 9.3.1 Floods and Earthquakes
 - 9.3.2 The Shifting Away of Indus
 - 9.3.3 Increased Aridity and Drying Up of the Ghaggar
 - 9.3.4 Barbarian Invasions
- 9.4 Ecological Imbalance: Theory of Gradual Decline
- 9.5 The Tradition Survives
 - 9.5.1 Sind
 - 9.5.2 The Indo-Iranian Borderlands
 - 9.5.3 Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan
 - 9.5.4 Kutch and Saurashtra
- 9.6 Transmission of the Harappan Tradition
- 9.7 What Survives from Harappa?
- 9.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.9 Key Words
- 9.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will get to know:

- about the problems faced by scholars to understand the decline of Harappan Civilization
- about the theories put forward for the decline of Harappa
- that why over the years scholars have stopped looking for the causes of decline of Harappa, and
- that instead scholars are trying to look for the evidence of survival and continuities of the Harappan Civilization.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units we have discussed the various aspects of origin and growth of Harappan Civilization. However, the disappearance of the various aspects of its maturity i.e. writing, town planning, etc. in the subsequent phase of ancient India is rather mysterious. In this unit we will examine the various arguments put forward to solve this mystery.

9.2 DECLINE OF HARAPPA : THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Cities like Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan experienced gradual decline in urban planning and construction. Houses made of old dilapidated bricks and shoddy construction encroached upon the roads and streets of the towns. Flimsy partitions sub-divided the courtyards of the houses. The cities were fast turning into slums. A detailed study of the architectures of Mohenjodaro shows that many entry points to the 'Great Bath' were blocked. Sometimes later the 'Great Bath' and the 'Granary' fell into total disuse. At the same time the late levels (i.e. later habitations) at Mohenjodaro showed a distinct reduction in the number of sculptures, figurines, beads, bangles and inlay works. Towards the end, the city of Mohenjodaro shrank to a small settlement of three hectares from the original eighty-five hectares.

Before its abandonment Harappa seems to have witnessed the arrival of a group of people about whom we know through their burial practices. They were using a pottery

which was different from those of the Harappans. Their culture is known as the 'Cemetery H' culture. Processes of decline were in evidence also in places like Kalibangan and Chanhudaro. We find that buildings associated with power and ideology were decaying and goods related to displays of prestige and splendour were becoming increasingly scarce. Later on, cities like Harappa and Mohenjodaro were abandoned altogether.

A study of the settlement pattern of the Harappan and Late Harappan sites in the Bahawalpur area also indicates a trend of decay. Along the banks of the Hakra river the number of settlements came down to 50 in the Late Harappan period from 174 in the Mature Harappan period. What seems likely is that in the last two-three hundred years of their life, the settlements in the core region of the Harappan civilization were declining. The population seems to have either perished or moved away to other areas. Whereas the number of sites in the triangle of Harappa, Bahawalpur and Mohenjodaro declined, the number of settlements in the outlying areas of Gujarat, East Punjab, Haryana and upper Doab increased. This indicates a phenomenal increase in the number of people in these areas. This sudden increase in the population of those regions can be explained by the emigration of people from the core regions of Harappa.

In the outlying regions of the Harappan civilization, i.e. the areas of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Punjab, people continue to live. But life had changed for them. Some of the important features associated with the Harappan civilization—writing, uniform weights, Harappan pottery and architectural style had disappeared.

The abandonment of the cities of the Indus is roughly dated to about 1800 B.C. This date is supported by the fact that the Mesopotamian literature stops referring to Meluhha by the end of 1900 B.C. However, even now, the chronology of the end of Harappan cities remains tentative. We do not as yet know whether the major settlements were abandoned at one and the same or at different periods. What is certain, however, is the fact the abandonment of the major cities and the de-urbanisation of other settlements indicates the decline of the Harappan civilization.



Map 3 : Sites of late Harappan Period

9.3 THEORIES OF SUDDEN DECLINE

Scholars have given different answers to the question as to why did the civilization end? Some scholars, believing in a dramatic collapse of the civilization, have looked for evidences of a calamity of catastrophic proportions, which wiped out the urban communities. Some of the more plausible theories for the decline of the Harappan civilization are:

- a) that it was destroyed by massive floods
- b) that the decline took place because of the shift in the course of rivers and the gradual drying up of the Ghaggar-Hakra river system
- c) that barbarian invaders destroyed the cities
- d) that the growing demands of the centres disturbed the ecology of the region and the area could not support them anymore.

Let us discuss these explanations on their merits.

9.3.1 Floods and Earthquakes

Among the causes spelled out for the decline of the Harappan civilization scholars have used the evidence of flooding in Mohenjodaro. It appears from the records of the principal excavators that in Mohenjodaro various periods of occupation were separated by evidences of deep flooding. This can be inferred from the fact that the houses and streets of Mohenjodaro were covered with silty clay and collapsed building material many times in its long history. This silty clay seems to have been left by the flood waters which had submerged the streets and houses. The people of Mohenjodaro again built up houses and streets on top of the debris of the previous buildings, after the floods had receded. This kind of catastrophic flooding and rebuilding on top of the debris seems to have happened at least thrice.

Borings in the occupation deposit indicated successive phases of occupation levels spanning a vertical distances of 70 feet which is equivalent to the height of a seven storied building. Many occupation deposits were divided by silt deposits. Thick silt deposits have been noticed at points as high as 80 feet above the present day ground level. Thus, many scholars believe that the evidences are indicative of abnormal floods in Mohenjodaro. These floods led to the temporary desertion and reoccupation of the city throughout its history.

That these floods were catastrophic is shown by silt deposits 80 feet above the present ground level, meaning that the flood waters rose to such height in this area. The Harappans at Mohenjodaro tired themselves out, trying to out top the recurring floods. A stage came when the impoverished Harappans could not take it any more and they simply abandoned the settlement.

Raikes's Hypothesis

The theory of catastrophic flooding has been carried further by a famous hydrologist R.L. Raikes. He argued that such flooding which could drown buildings 30 feet above the ground level of the settlement could not be the result of normal flooding in the river Indus. He believes that the Harappan civilization declined because of catastrophic flooding causing prolonged submergence of the cities located on the bank of the river Indus. He has shown that geomorphologically speaking the Indus area is a disturbed seismic zone. Earthquakes might have raised the level of the flood plains of the lower Indus river. This uplift of the plain along an axis roughly at right angles to that of the river Indus blocked the passage of the river water to the sea. This led to the ponding of the waters of the river Indus. A lake was formed in the area where cities of the Indus had once flourished. And thus, the rising water levels of the river swallowed cities like Mohenjodaro.

It has been pointed out that sites like Sutkagedor and Sutka-koh on the Makran Coast and Balakot near Karachi were seaports of the Harappans. However, at present, they are located far away from the sea-coast. This has happened because of the upliftment of the land on the sea-coast possibly caused by violent tectonic uplifts. Some scholars believe that these tectonic uplifts took place somewhere in the second millennium B.C. These violent earthquakes, damming rivers and burning the towns destroyed the Harappan civilization. This led to the disruption of the commercial life based on river and coastal communication.

Criticism

This grand theory of the catastrophic fall of the Harappan civilization is not accepted by many scholars. H.T. Lambrick points out that the idea that a river would be dammed in such a manner even by tectonic uplifts is incorrect due to two reasons:

- i) Even if an earthquake artificially raised a bund down stream, the large volume of water from the Indus would easily breach it. In recent times in Sind, a swell of ground raised by the earthquake of 1819 was breached by the first flood it faced from one of the smaller streams of the Indus called Nara.
- ii) Silt deposition would parallel the rising surface of water in the hypothetical lake. It would take place along the bottom of the former course of the river. Thus, the silt of Mohenjodaro might not be the deposition of a flood. Another criticism of this theory is that it fails to explain the decline of the settlements outside the Indus system.

9.3.2 The Shifting Away of the Indus

Lambrick has offered his own explanation for the decline. He believes that changes in the course of the river Indus could be the cause of the destruction of Mohenjodaro. The Indus is an unstable river system which keeps shifting its bed. Apparently, the river Indus shifted about thirty miles away from Mohenjodaro. The people of the city and the surrounding food production villages deserted the area because they were starved of water. This kind of thing happened many times in the history of Mohenjodaro. The silt observed in the city is actually the product of wind action blowing in lots of sand and silt. This, combined with disintegrating mud, mud brick and baked brick structures, produced what has been mistaken for silt produced by floods.

This theory too cannot explain the decline of the Harappan civilization in totality. At best, it can explain the desertion of Mohenjodaro. And if the people of Mohenjodaro were familiar with those kinds of shifts in the river course why could not they themselves shift to some new settlement and establish another city like Mohenjodaro? Obviously, it appears that some other factors were at work.

9.3.3 Increased Aridity and Drying Up of the Ghaggar

D.P. Agarwal and Sood have introduced a new theory for the decline of the Harappan civilization. They believe that the Harappan civilization declined because of the increasing aridity in this area and the drying up of the river Ghaggar-Hakra. Basing their conclusions on the studies conducted in the U.S.A., Australia and Rajasthan they have shown that there was an increase in the arid conditions by the middle of the second millennium B.C. In semi-arid regions like those of the Harappa, even a minor reduction in moisture and water availability could spell disaster. It would affect agricultural production which in turn would put the city economies under stress.

They have discussed the problem of the unstable river systems in western Rajasthan. As stated earlier the Ghaggar-Hakra area represented one of the core regions of the Harappan civilization. The Ghaggar was a mighty stream flowing through Punjab, Rajasthan and the Rann of Kutch before debouching into the sea.

Rivers Sutlej and Yamuna used to be the tributaries of this river. Because of some tectonic disturbances, the Sutlej stream was captured by the Indus river and the Yamuna shifted east to join the Ganges. This kind of change in the river regime, which left the Ghaggar waterless, would have catastrophic implication for the towns located in this area. Apparently, the ecological disturbances brought by the increased aridity and the shift in the drainage pattern led to the decline of the Harappan civilization.

Interesting though this theory is, it has some problems. The theory about the onset of arid conditions have not been fully worked out and one needs more information. Similarly, the drying up of the Ghaggar has not been dated properly as yet.

9.3.4 Barbarian Invasions

Wheeler believed that the Harappan civilization was destroyed by the Aryan invaders. It has been pointed out that in the late phases of occupation at Mohenjodaro there are evidences of a massacre. Human skeletons have been found lying on the streets. The Rig Veda time and again refers to the fortresses of the Dasas and Dasyus. The Vedic god Indra is called 'Purandara' meaning 'the destroyer of forts'. The

geographical area of the habitation of the Rig Vedic Aryans included the Punjab and the Ghaggar-Hakra region. Since there are no remains of other cultural groups having forts in this area in this historical phase, Wheeler believed that it was the Harappan cities that were being described in the Rig Veda. In fact, the Rig Veda mentions a place called Hariyupiya. This place was located on the bank of the river Ravi. The Aryans fought a battle here. The name of the place sounds very similar to that of Harappa. These evidences led Wheeler to conclude that it was the Aryan invaders who destroyed the cities of Harappa.

Attractive though this theory is, it is not acceptable to a host of scholars. They point out that the provisional date for the decline of the Harappan civilization is believed to be 1800 B.C. The Aryans on the other hand are believed to have arrived here not earlier than a period around 1500 B.C. At the present state of knowledge it is difficult to revise either of the dates and so, the Harappans and the Aryans are unlikely to have met each other. Also, neither Mohenjodaro nor Harappa yield any other evidence of a military assault. The evidence of the human bodies lying exposed in the streets is important. This, however, could have been caused by raids by bandits from the surrounding hilly tracts. In any case, the big cities were already in a state of decay. This cannot be explained by the invasion hypothesis.

Theories of Decline I Sudden (Catastrophic) Theories

Flood & Earthquake	Mohenjodaro destroyed by Shifting of Indus River	Increased aridity led to decline	Barbarian or Aryan invasions destroyed Harappa
Flood : Evidence a) Occupation levels divided by silt deposits. b) Houses and Streets covered by silt deposits upto 30 ft. above ground level. c) Houses built on silt covered debris.	Evidence Silt is there in Harappa because of wind action which brought sand and silt. Sand silt not due to floods. Criticism This can explain only desertion of Mohenjodaro but not its decline.	Evidence a) Middle of 2nd Millennium B.C. a period of increased arid conditions. b) In such a situation a semi-arid region (like Harappa) would be affected most—decline of agriculture would result. c) Tectonic movement would affect river system like Ghaggar which would dry up. Criticism a) Not fully worked out. b) Drying up of river Ghaggar not dated yet.	Evidence a) Human skeletons have been found lying on the streets. b) Rig Veda refers to fortresses of 'dasyas' which god Purandara destroys. c) The geographical area of Rig Veda Aryans includes Punjab Ghaggar region. d) Vedas mention a place called Hariyapiya on Ravi where Aryans fought a battle. Name similar to Harappa. Criticism Decline of Harappa around 1800 B.C. whereas Aryans not earlier than 1500 B.C. So Harappans and Aryans clash seems difficult to accept.
Earthquake: Evidence a) Indus area is disturbed earthquake zone b) Earthquake raised the level of flood plains blocking passage of river water to sea, forcing water in to cities. c) Earthquake caused shift of land away from sea coast affecting commercial cities.			
Criticism a) Decline of settlements outside Indus Valley will not be explained by this theory. b) A river cannot be dammed by tectonic effects.			

Check Your Progress 1

1 The decline of Harappan civilization cannot be explained by floods and earthquakes theory because

- i it explains the decline of settlements outside Indus Valley
- ii it cannot explain the decline of settlements outside the Indus Valley
- iii the Harappans knew how to face floods and earthquakes
- iv none of the above.

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- 2 The increased aridity in the Harappan area cannot explain the decline of Harappa because
 - i it is a fully worked out theory
 - ii it is not a fully worked out theory
 - iii drying up of river Ghaggar is not dated yet
 - iv both (ii) and (iii)
- 3 Discuss in about 50 words the evidence for and against the theory of Barbarian invasions having destroyed Harappa.

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9.4 ECOLOGICAL IMBALANCE

Scholars like Fairervis tried to explain the decay of the Harappan civilization in terms of the problems of ecology. He computed the population of the Harappan cities and worked out the food requirements of the townsmen. He also computed that the villagers in these areas consume about 80% of their produce leaving about 20% for the market. If similar patterns of agriculture existed in the past, a city like Mohenjodaro, having a population of about 35 thousand, would require very large number of villages producing food. According to Fairervis's calculation the delicate ecological balance of these semi-arid areas was being disturbed because the human and cattle population in these areas was fast depleting the scanty forests, food and fuel resources. The combined needs of the Harappan townsmen, peasants and pastoralists exceeded the limited production capacities of these areas. Thus, a growing population of men and animals confronted by scanty resources wore out the landscape.

With the forests and grass cover gradually disappearing, there were more floods and droughts. This depletion of the subsistence base caused strain on the entire economy of the civilization. There seems to have been a gradual movement away to areas which offered better subsistence possibilities. That is why the Harappan communities moved towards Gujarat and the eastern areas, away from the Indus.

Of all the theories discussed so far Fairervis's theory seems to be the most plausible one. Probably the gradual deterioration in the town planning and the living standards was a reflection of the depleting subsistence base of the Harappans. This process of decline was completed by the raids and attacks of the surrounding communities. However, the theory of environmental disaster also has some problems.

- The enduring fertility of soils of the Indian sub-continent over the subsequent millennia disproves the hypothesis of soil exhaustion in this area.
- Also, the computation of the needs of the Harappan population is based on scanty information and a lot more information would be needed to make a calculation of the subsistence needs of the Harappans.

Thus, any theory based on such scanty information will remain a hypothesis, unless substantiated by more evidence in its favour.

The emergence of the Harappan civilization involved a delicate balance of relations between cities, towns and villages, rulers, peasants and nomads. It also means a fragile but important relationship with the communities of the neighbouring areas who were in possession of minerals crucial for trade. Similarly, it meant maintenance of contact with the contemporary civilizations and cultures. Apart from this, we have to take into account the ecological factor of relationship with nature. Any breakdown in these chains of relationships could lead to the decline of the cities.

9.5 THE TRADITION SURVIVES

Scholars working on the Indus civilization no longer look for the causes of its decline. This is because of the fact that the scholars who studied the Harappan civilization right upto the 1960s believed that the collapse of the civilization was sudden. These scholars concentrated their work on the studies of cities, town planning and large structures. Such problems as the relationship of the Harappan cities with the contemporary villages and the continuity of various elements of the Harappan civilization were ignored. Thus, the debate about the causes of the decline of the Harappan civilization became more and more abstract. It was towards the end of the sixties that scholars like Malik and Possehl focused their attention on various aspects of continuity of the Harappan tradition. These studies have yielded more exciting result than the debate about the causes for the decline of the Harappan civilization. It is true that Harappa and Mohenjodaro were abandoned and the urban phase came to an end. However, if we take a perspective covering the entire geographical spread of the Harappan civilization, quite a few things seem to continue in the old style.

Archaeologically speaking some changes are observable—some of the settlements were abandoned but most other settlements remained in occupation. However, the tradition of uniform writing, seals, weights and pottery was lost. The objects showing intensive interaction among the far flung settlements were lost. In other words the activities associated with city-centred economies were given up. Thus the changes that came about simply indicated the end of the urban phase. Small villages and towns continued to exist and the archaeological finds from these sites show many elements of the Harappan tradition.

In most of the sites in Sind it is difficult to observe any change in the pottery tradition. In fact in the areas of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana, vibrant agricultural communities emerged in large numbers in the succeeding period. Thus, from a regional perspective, the period succeeding the urban phase can be treated as one of flourishing agricultural villages which outnumber those of the urban phase. That is why scholars now discuss issues like cultural change, regional migrations and modification in the system of settlement and subsistence. After all no one talks about the end of the ancient Indian Civilization in early medieval India when most of the cities of the Gangetic Valley declined. Let us see what kinds of archaeological remains survive after end of the urban phase.

9.5.1 Sind

In Sind, i.e. at the Harappan towns Amri and Chanhudaro Jhukar, etc., people continued to live as of old. They were still staying in brick houses but they gave up the planned lay out. They were using a slightly different pottery called the Jhukar pottery. It was a buff-ware with red slip with paintings in black. Recent studies suggested that this pottery evolved from the 'Mature Harappan' pottery and as such need not be considered something new. In Jhukar certain distinctive metal objects have been found which might be indicative of trade links with Iran or what is more likely—the influx of a migrant population having Iranian or Central Asian influences. A shaft-hole, axes and copper pins with looped or decorated heads have parallels in Iranian settlements. Circular stamp seals of stone or faience and a bronze cosmetic jar are also indicative of contacts with the cultures to the West of the Indus.

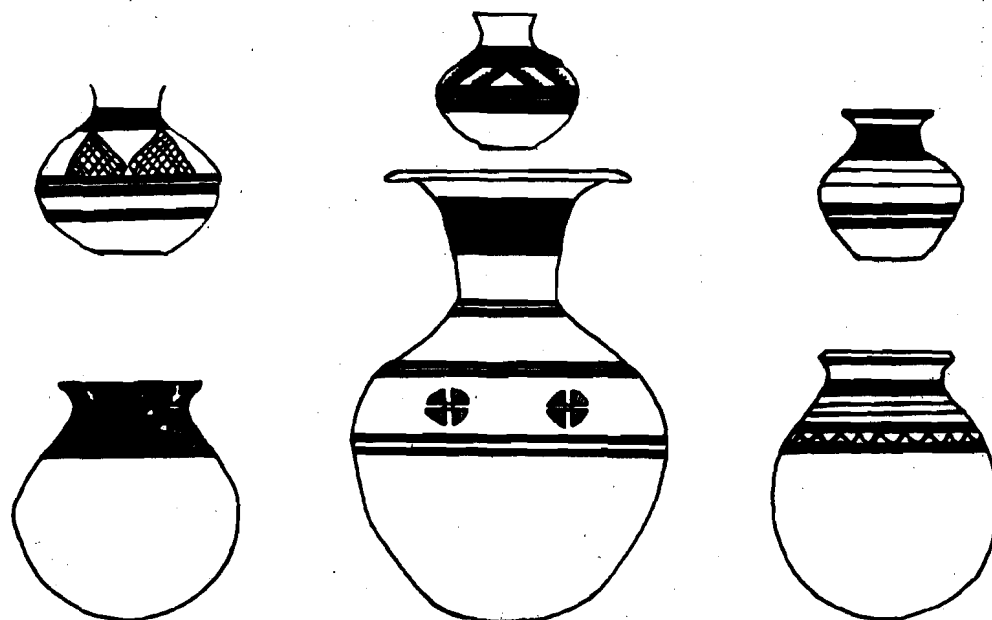
9.5.2 The Indo-Iranian Borderlands

The areas to the west of the Indus—Baluchistan and the Indo-Iranian border lands also show the presence of people using copper stamp seals and copper shaft hole axes. Sites like Shahi Tump, Mundigak, Naushahro and Pirak indicate movements of people and contacts with Iran. Unfortunately the dating of these settlements is still not clearly worked out.

9.5.3 Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan

In the areas of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan several settlements have been reported where people continued to live in the same old way after the decline of the cities. However, the Harappan influences on the pottery tradition gradually declined and the local pottery traditions which were always present along with the Harappan

pottery gradually replaced the Harappan pottery altogether. Thus, the decline of urbanism was reflected in the reassertion of regional traditions in these areas. The sites of Mitathal, Bara, Ropar and Siswal are well known. Brick houses have been reported from Bara and Siswal. In many of these sites Ochre Coloured Pottery has been found. This pottery underlay many early historical sites in ancient India. As such these village cultures of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan are linked with the Harappan tradition of the past and anticipate the early Indian tradition. In all about 139 late in the upper Gangetic valley also many agricultural settlements were established. They show remote late Harappan influences. This area became the heartland of the subsequent phase of Indian civilization.

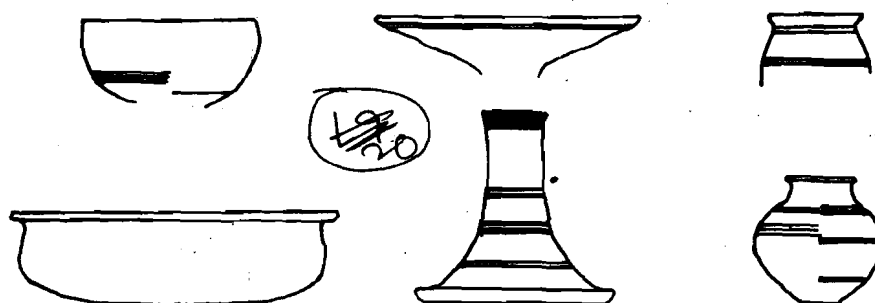


19. Late Harappan pottery from Haryana

9.5.4 Kutch and Saurashtra

In Kutch and Saurashtra the end of the urban phase is clearly documented in places like Rangapur and Somnath. Even during the urban phase they had a local ceramic tradition co-existing with the Harappan pottery. This tradition continued in later phases. Some sites like Rangapur seem to have become more prosperous in the succeeding period. They were using potteries called the Lustrous Red Ware. However, the people stopped using the Indus weights, script and tools imported from distant areas. Now they were using stone tools made of locally available stones.

In the 'Mature Harappan' phase there were 13 settlements in Gujarat. In the subsequent 'Late Harappan' dated to about 2100 B.C. phase the number of settlement went upto 200 or more. This increase in the number of settlements indicating an increase in population cannot be explained by biological factors. In pre-modern societies the population could not increase so much in a space of a few generations.



20. Late Harappan pottery from Rangapur.

that 13 settlements could multiply into more than 200 or more settlements. Thus, there is a distinct possibility that people inhabiting these new settlements came from other areas. Late Harappan settlements have also been reported from Maharashtra, where their culture merged into those of the emerging agricultural communities.

9.6 TRANSMISSION OF THE HARAPPAN TRADITION

The end of the cities did not mean the end of the Harappan tradition. It is evident from our discussion that archaeologically speaking the Harappan communities merged into the surrounding agricultural groups. However, the centralised decision-making in the polity and economy had ended. The Harappan communities which continued after the urban phase would have definitely retained their older traditions. It is likely that the Harappan peasants would retain their forms of worship. The priests of the Harappan urban centres were part of a highly organised literate tradition. Even if literacy ended they are likely to have preserved their religious practices. The dominant community of the subsequent early historic period called itself 'The Aryans'. These people do not seem to have possessed a literate tradition. Possibly, the priestly groups of the Harappans merged into the ruling groups of the Aryans. As such the Harappan religious tradition would be transmitted to the historical India. The folk communities also retained the traditions of craftsmanship as is evident from the pottery and tool making traditions. Once again when literate urban culture emerged in early India it absorbed elements of the folk cultures. This would provide a more effective channel of transmission of the Harappan tradition.

Theories of Decline II

Gradual Decline Theories

Decline due to ecological imbalance

Evidence

- 1) Calculation that ecological balance in these semi-arid areas was being disturbed because the human and cattle population was depleting scarce forests, food & fuel resources.
- 2) With the forests disappearing there were more floods and droughts.
- 3) Townsmen moved away to Gujarat and eastern areas.
- 4) This process of decline completed by raids & attacks of nearby settlements.

Criticism

- 1) Soil continues to be fertile till today in this area. This disproves soil exhaustion hypothesis.
- 2) Calculation of needs of Harappan towns requires more information before this hypothesis is substantiated.

The No Decline or Continuity hypothesis

The ecological argument has focused on the relationship between man and nature in Indus Valley.

Problems in explaining decline has led the scholars to

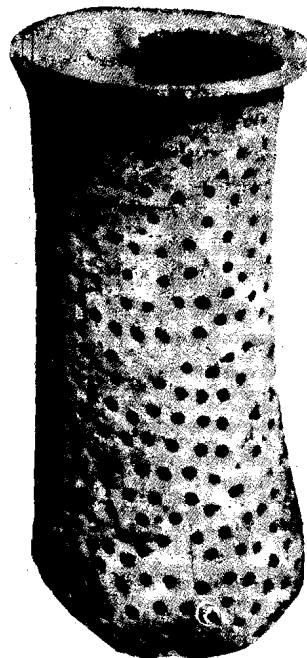
- a) abandon the search for causes of decline.
- b) look for continuities of Harappa in a geographical perspective.
- c) accept that the cities declined and certain traditions like seals, writing, pottery were lost.

9.7 WHAT SURVIVES FROM HARAPPA ?

The cults of Pasupati (Siva) and of the mother goddess and phallic worship seem to have come down to us from the Harappan tradition. Similarly, the cult of sacred places, rivers or trees and sacred animals show a distinct continuity in the subsequent historic civilization of India. The evidence of fire worship and sacrifice in Kalibangan and Lothal is significant. These were the most significant elements of the Vedic religion. Could the Aryans have learnt these practices from the Harappan priesthood? This hypothesis would require more evidence but it is not unlikely.

Many aspects of domestic life like the house plans, disposition of water supply and attention to bathing survived in the settlements of the subsequent periods. The

traditional weight and currency system of India, based on a ratio of sixteen as the unit, was already present in the Harappan civilization. It might well have been derived from them. The techniques of making potter's wheel in modern India is similar to those used by the Harappans. Bullock carts and boats used in modern India were already present in the Harappan cities. As such we can say that many elements of the Harappan civilization survived in the subsequent historical tradition.



21. Perforated Jar

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 It is difficult to accept the theory of ecological imbalance because: (Mark (✓) the correct statement).
 - i it does not explain why soil continues to be fertile in the Indus Valley area
 - ii we do not have adequate data to tell us about the needs of Harappan towns
 - iii townsmen continued to stay on in Harappa
 - iv both (i) and (ii)
- 2 Mark (✓) the correct statement.

Scholars today:

 - i are looking for fresh causes of decline of the Harappan Civilization
 - ii have stopped looking for fresh causes of decline of Harappa
 - iii are looking for what survived from Harappa in the later settlements
 - iv both (ii) and (iii)
- 3 Write in about 50 words about the importance of what has survived from Harappa.

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9.8 LET US SUM UP

We have seen that scholars have offered various theories of the sudden decline of Harappa. But all these theories had to be given up because of lack of adequate evidence. Gradually scholars have given up looking for causes of decline of Harappa. Now the focus is on understanding the late phases of Harappa. This is looked into to expose the continuities of Harappa which might have survived in the flourishing agricultural communities of the time. And no doubt there have been certain characteristics of Harappa which transcended down to the historic phase.

9.9 KEY WORDS

Ecology : Study of plants or animals or peoples and institutions in relationship to the environment.

Tectonic Uplift : Relating to the process which elevate large areas of earth's surface.

Aryans : A group of people who spoke the Indo-European languages like Sanskrit, Latin, Greek etc.

Dasa and Dasyu : Peoples mentioned in the Rig Veda. The Aryans were in conflict with their chiefs.

Ochre Coloured Pottery : A pottery found in the upper Gangetic plains. It has been found at the levels that underlie early Indian historical pottery.

Late Levels : An excavated archaeological site is divided into layers or settlement levels according to their ages. Accordingly the late or the youngest settlement level will be somewhere near the top of the site and the oldest will be at the bottom most layer.

Catastrophic : Disastrous.

Occupation deposits : At each level of the excavated site there will be evidence in form of pottery etc. to show that the site was occupied. These deposits are called occupational deposits.

Silt : Material deposit from a flowing river on the banks.

Arid : Dry.

9.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 (ii) 2 (iv) 3 See Sub-section 9.3.4. Your answer should include both the material evidence and the written evidence.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 (iv) 2 (iv) 3 See Section 9.7. Your answer should tell us how this points to the continuity of Harappan tradition.

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

Bridget and Allchin, *The Rise of Civilizations in India and Pakistan*, Select Book Service, New Delhi, 1988

D.P. Agrawal and D.K. Chakrabarti (ed.), *Essays in Indian Proto-History*, New Delhi, 1979.

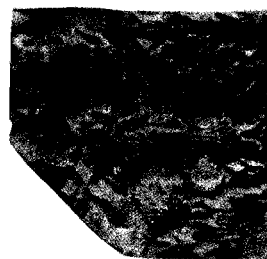
John Marshall, *Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization*, Volumes I and II, 1973 (Reprint).

B.B. Lal and S.P. Gupta (ed.), *Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*, New Delhi, 1982.

R.E.M. Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization*, London, 1968.

D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in its Historical Outline*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1987

Some Seals of Harappan Civilizations



UNIT 10 CHALCOLITHIC AND EARLY IRON AGE-I

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Ochre Coloured Pottery Culture
- 10.3 The Problems of Copper Hoards
- 10.4 Black and Red Ware Culture
- 10.5 Painted Grey Ware Culture
- 10.6 Northern Black Polished Ware Culture
 - 10.6.1 Structures
 - 10.6.2 Pottery
 - 10.6.3 Other Objects
 - 10.6.4 Ornaments
 - 10.6.5 Terracotta Figurines
 - 10.6.6 Subsistence Economy and Trade
- 10.7 Chalcolithic Cultures of Western, Central and Eastern India
 - 10.7.1 Pottery: Diagnostic Features
 - 10.7.2 Economy
 - 10.7.3 Houses and Habitations
 - 10.7.4 Other Characteristics
 - 10.7.5 Religion/Belief Systems
 - 10.7.6 Social Organization
- 10.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.9 Key Words
- 10.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

10.0 OBJECTIVES

In Block 2, you have learnt about the antecedent stages and various aspects of Harappan culture and society. You have also read about its geographical spread and the reasons for its decline and diffusion. In this unit we shall learn about the post-Harappan, Chalcolithic, and early Iron Age Cultures of northern, western, central and eastern India. After reading this unit you will be able to know about:

- the geographical location and the adaptation of the people to local conditions,
- the kind of houses they lived in, the varieties of food they grew and the kinds of tools and implements they used,
- the varieties of potteries used by them,
- the kinds of religious beliefs they had, and
- the changes occurring during the early Iron age.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

By the second millennium B.C. several regional cultures sprang up in different parts of the Indian subcontinent. These were non-urban, non-Harappan and were characterized by the use of stone and copper tools. Hence, these cultures are termed as chalcolithic cultures.

The chalcolithic cultures are identified on the basis of their geographical location. Thus, we have:

- the Banas culture (located in the Banas basin) in Rajasthan,
- Kayatha culture (type site Kayatha on the bank of river Kalisindh, an affluent of the Chambal) and represented by other sites in central India (in the Narmada, Tapi and Mahi valleys),
- Malwa culture (Malwa, and extending into other parts of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra), and
- the Jorwe culture (Maharashtra).

As type sites of these cultures have been excavated we have been able to form a detailed idea about such dimensions of them as:

- pattern of settlement,
- pattern of economy,
- mortuary practices, and
- religious beliefs.

In addition to cultural material of this phase, found at excavated sites, in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Karnataka are found catches of copper/bronze objects. As these have been found in hoards (about a thousand objects altogether from 85 sites in the above mentioned states) these sites were thought to represent a distinct Copper Hoard culture. At Saipai (Etawah Distt.) a site in Uttar Pradesh, a copper harpoon has been found in association with a pottery known as Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP). Though some of the other Copper Hoard sites have yielded OCP, the copper objects are not found in direct association with OCP. As more than a hundred sites have yielded this characteristic pottery in the Ganga-Yamuna doab, these sites are described as belonging to the OCP culture. The OCP culture is succeeded by Black and Red Ware (BRW) and Painted Grey Ware (PGW) cultures, which are distinguished by diagnostic pottery types. In North India, there is a distinct concentration of Painted Grey Ware sites in Haryana and Upper Ganga Valley, of which 30 have been excavated. Iron makes its appearance in the Painted Grey Ware culture, and in the ensuing phase, known as the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBP) culture, its use becomes more widespread. Starting from the sixth century B.C. we also see the beginnings of urbanisation.

Terms like BRW culture, PGW culture and NBP culture need to be clarified here. These cultures are described by the pottery types only because that particular pottery happens to be a distinctive feature of that culture though there may be many other aspects of that culture. The pottery type is used only to give an identity or name to a specific culture. For example in a particular region where Painted Grey Ware is found the culture of that site is described as PGW culture.

To understand the cultural developments after the decline of Harappan Civilization we should begin with Northern India, especially the Ganga-Yamuna doab.

10.2 OCHRE COLOURED POTTERY CULTURE

A new pottery type was discovered in trial excavations conducted in 1950 at Bisauli (Badaun district) and Rajpur Parsu (Bijnor district) in Uttar Pradesh, both of them being Copper Hoard sites. This pottery is made of medium grained clay, underfired and has a wash of ochre (which has a tendency to rub off) ranging from orange to red. Hence, those sites associated with this ware are ascribed to Ochre Coloured Pottery culture (OCP culture). So far more than 100 sites which extend from Mayapur in Saharanpur district to Saipai in Etawah district (U.P.) have been discovered.

Ochre Coloured Pottery sites are generally located on river banks. These sites are small in size and the mounds have a low height at many of the sites (e.g. Bahadarabad, Bisauli, Rajpur Parsu, Saipai). This indicates a relatively short duration of these settlements. The distance between settlements varies from 5 km to 8 km. At some of the OCP sites (e.g. Ambkheri, Baheria, Bahadarabad, Jhinhana, Lal Qila, Atranjikhhera, Saipai) excavations have revealed no signs of regular habitation. At Hastinapura and Ahichchhatra there is a break in occupation between the OCP culture and the succeeding PGW culture, while at Atranjikhhera the OCP settlements are succeeded by Black and Red Ware Pottery.

The material remains of OCP culture are mostly in the form of pottery. These consist of jars (including storage jars), bowls, ring-footed bowls, flasks, handled pots, miniature pots, basins spouts, etc.

The other objects comprise terracotta bangles; beads of terracotta and carnelian; terracotta animal figurines and cart wheels with a central knob; stone querns and pestles; and bone points. A copper harpoon has been found in the OCP stratum at Saipai.

Not much evidence is available regarding structures. From the evidence recorded at Lal Qila, which is scanty, it is known that floors were made of rammed earth. The structures consisted of wattle and daub houses. This is suggested on the basis of burnt mud plaster and mud clods with reed and bamboo impressions being found at Lal Qila.

Archaeobotanical remains recovered at Atranjikhhera and related to this culture indicate that rice, barley, gram and kesari were grown. On the basis of similarity in pottery types some scholars believe that the OCP represented a degenerated form of the late Harappan pottery.

On the basis of Thermoluminescence dates obtained from OCP pottery, the culture has been ascribed to 2000 B.C. to 1500 B.C.

10.3 THE PROBLEMS OF COPPER HOARDS

The first discovery of a copper object (a copper harpoon) that belonged to the Copper Hoard culture was made as early as 1822 at a place called Bithur in Kanpur district. Since then nearly one thousand copper objects have been found in hoards, from 85 sites.

State-wise Copper Hoard Sites

STATE	NUMBER OF SITES
Haryana	5
Rajasthan	6
Uttar Pradesh	33
Bihar	19
West Bengal	6
Orissa	7
Madhya Pradesh	8
Karnataka	1

It is possible that copper hoard objects have been found in other states like Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh, but have not yet been properly reported.

The copper objects found in a hoard range from 1 to 47 excepting at Gungeria in Madhya Pradesh where a single hoard contained 424 objects. These Copper Hoards came to light while ploughing a field, digging a canal or making a road, i.e. all of them were accidental discoveries. It is only at Saipai, that a copper harpoon was found in excavation in a stratum associated with OCP.

These copper objects are classified into several types. The main types are (a) celts, (b) rings, (c) harpoons, (d) antennae swords, (e) hooked swords, (f) anthropomorphs and (g) double axes.

Considering the occurrence of a copper harpoon in association with the OCP at Saipai, and the fact that Copper Hoards have been found at other OCP sites (though not in a direct archaeological association) they can be related to the OCP culture. In this way the period of the Copper Hoards can also be ascribed to 2000 B.C. to 1500 B.C.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Discuss in about ten lines the main characteristics of the CCP culture.

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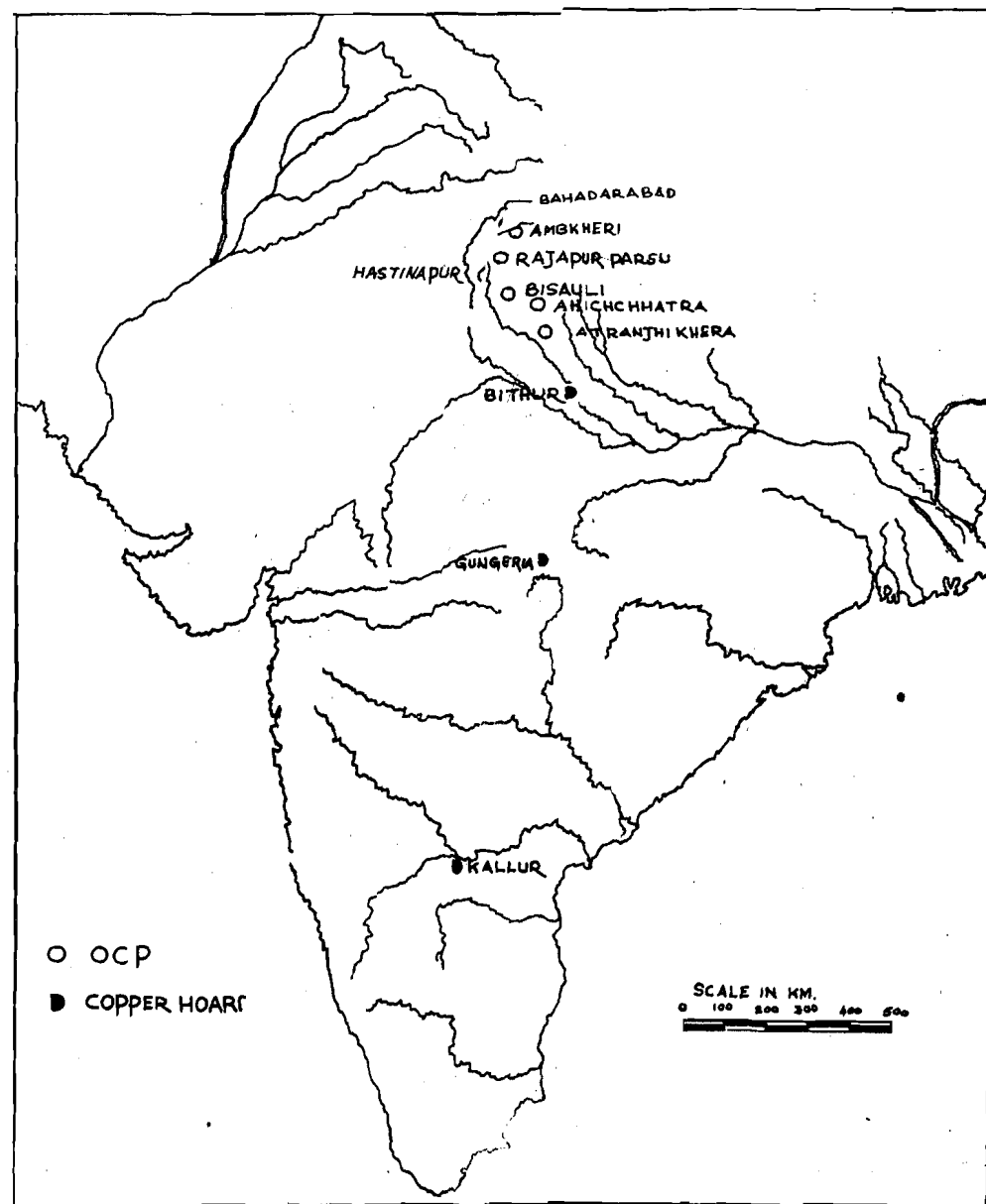
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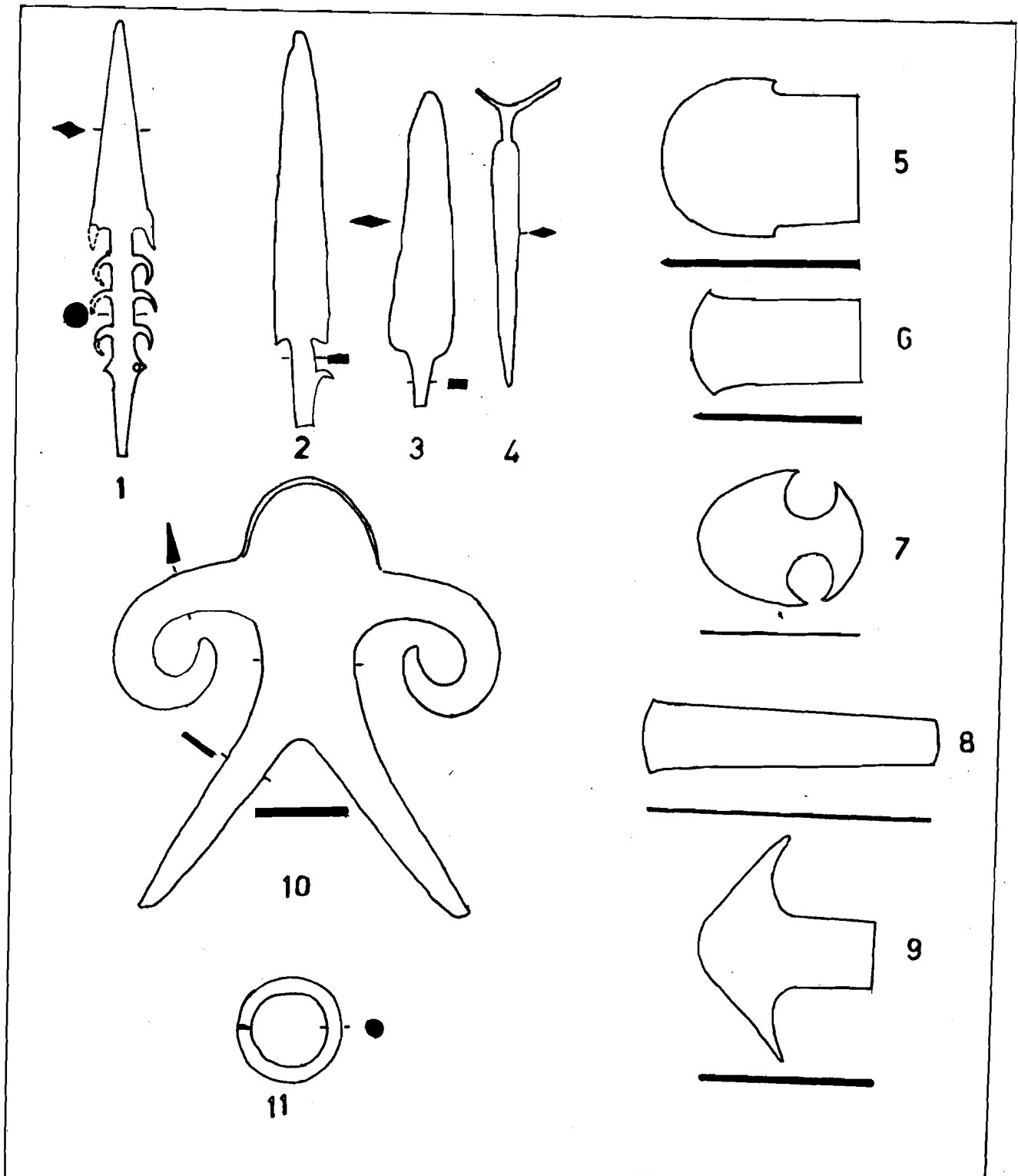
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OCP and Copper Hoard Cultures

- 2) Which of the statement is right or wrong? Mark (✓) or (×).
- OCP sites are located in Mountains.
 - The material remains of OCP culture are mainly house structures.
 - The period of Copper Hoards is 2500 B.C.
 - Most of the Copper Hoards found were accidental discoveries.



Copper hoard objects. 1. harpoon; 2. hook sword; 3. sword; 4. Antenna sword; 5,6. celts; 7. double axe; 8. bar celt; 9. shouldered axe; 10. anthropomorph.

10.4 BLACK AND RED WARE CULTURE

Excavations at Atranjikhara in the early 1960s revealed a distinct horizon,

sandwiched between OCP and PGW levels. This horizon has a characteristic pottery called Black and Red Ware (BRW). A similar stratigraphic sequence has been discovered in the 1970s at Jodhpura and Noh in Rajasthan. But at Ahichchhatra, Hastinapura and Alamgirpur BRW is found associated with PGW.

Pottery: The characteristic features of this pottery are the black colour inside and near the rim on outside, and red colour, over the rest of the body. This colour combination, it is believed, has been produced by inverted firing. The pottery is mostly wheel turned, though some pots are also handmade. It is made of fine clay and has a fine fabric with thin walls. Black and Red Ware pottery with paintings has also been found at sites in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. But in the BRW of the doab area there is absence of paintings.

Other Objects: In the excavations at Atranjikhhera have been found fragments of stones, waste flakes, chips; cores of quartz, chalcedony, agate and carnelian; one bead each of carnelian, shell and copper; a copper ring; and a fragment of comb made of bone. No stone or metal tools have been found. Jodhpura has yielded a bone spike. From Noh shapeless piece of iron, a terracotta bead and a bone spike have been discovered.

BRW in the Doab and Other Regions: Some scholars see affinities between the BRW of Atranjikhhera and Gilund and Ahar of southern Rajasthan on the basis of a comparison of fabric, texture and burnishing. But there are differences as well as in the shape and designs of the potteries found in these areas.

- The important feature of doab BRW (also of that at Noh) is its plain surface, devoid of any paintings. The BRW found at Gilund and Ahar, on the other hand, is painted in white on black surface.
- There are also typological differences. The painted BRW from Ahar has pronounced carinated concave sides, and the fabric is coarse. The plain BRW of the doab has no carination, and the fabric is fine.
- The dish with featureless rim and concave sides present in large numbers in the BRW of the doab is absent at Ahar and Gilund.
- Bowls with spouts and dish-on-stand present at Ahar and Gilund have not been found in the doab sites.

It is important to note that Black and Red Ware with some variation from region to region has a wide distribution. It occurs from Rupar in the north to Adichanallur in the south, and from Amra and Lakhahwal in the west to Pandu-Rajar-Dhibi in the east. It also covers a vast time span: from 2400 B.C. to the early centuries of the Christian era.

10.5 PAINTED GREY WARE CULTURE

Since the first discovery of Painted Grey Ware (PGW) at Ahichchhatra in 1946, a huge number of sites have been brought to light in different parts of north India. Out of these 30 sites have been excavated. Some of the well known excavated sites are Rupar (Punjab), Bhagwanpura (Haryana), Noh (Rajasthan) Alamgirpur, Ahichchhatra, Hastinapura, Atranjikhhera, Jakhera and Mathura (all in Uttar Pradesh).

The concentration of PGW sites is in the Indo-Gangetic divide (Haryana), Sutlej basin and the upper Ganga plains. Settlements are located along river banks. The average distance from one site to the other is about 10 km. to 12 km. though in some cases it is also 5 km. The settlements at these sites are mostly small villages (1 to 4 hectares) with the exception of Bhukari (Ambala district, Haryana) which is an extensive settlement covering 96,193 sq.m. Let us examine the various objects that are found associated with the PGW culture:

- Pottery:** Pottery is wheel made, out of well lavigated clay and has a thin core:
 - It has a smooth surface, grey to ash-grey in colour.
 - It is painted in black and sometimes in a deep chocolate colour on the outer as well as inner surface.
 - It has nearly 42 designs and the most common types are bowls and dishes.



Circular Hutment, Jakhera



Mud Wall, Jakhera



House Floor, Jakhera

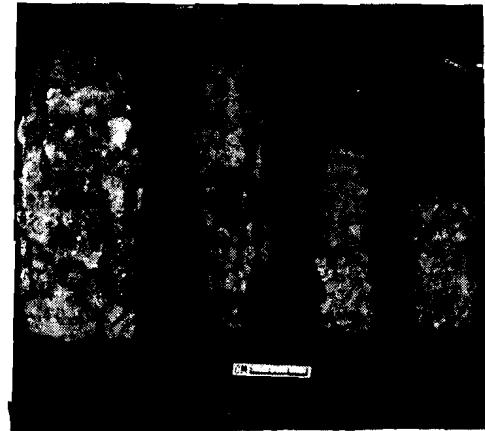


Storage Bin, Jakhera

- ii) **Structures:** The houses and other structures were of wattle and daub. This is indicated by the occurrence of patches of burnt earth, mud bricks, burnt bricks, mud platforms and mud plaster pieces with reed and bamboo impressions in the excavations at Ahichchhatra, Hastinapura, Atranjikhara and Jakhera. Excavations at Bhagwanpura (Haryana) site revealed different structural phases. Post holes in the first phase indicate circular and rectangular huts. In the second phase, one house has 13 rooms with a corridor between the two sets of rooms. This house also has a courtyard.
- iii) **Other Objects:** A variety of objects made out of copper, iron, glass and bone were found in excavations. These consist of axes, chisels, fish hooks and arrowheads. Spearheads are made only of iron. Among the agricultural implements, only a sickle and a hoe, made of iron have been found at Jakhera.



Mud Wall, Jakhera



Mud Wall, Jakhera

Iron objects are found at all the sites except Hastinapura. Atranjikhhera alone has yielded 135 objects, a furnace, iron slag close to the surface, and a pair of tongs. At Jodhpura there is evidence of two furnaces. It has been suggested that iron ore was procured from other regions.

The people were fond of ornaments. Beads of terracotta, agate, jasper, carnelian, chalcedony, lapis lazuli, glass and bone have been found. Two glass bangles were found at Hastinapura and copper bangles have been found at Jakhera.

Th terracotta objects comprise human (male and female) and animal (bull and horse) figurines, discs, balls, potter's stamps, etc.

- iv) **Crops and Animal Remains:** Evidence of cultivated crops is available only at Hastinapura and Atranjikhhera. At the former site, remains of only rice were found and the latter has yielded the remains of wheat and barley. Bones of horse, cattle, pig, goat and deer have been found at Hastinapura, Allahpura and Atranjikhhera. These include both wild as well as domesticated animals.
- v) **Trade Practices and Linkages:** Beads made of a variety of semi-precious stones (like agate, jasper, carnelian, chalcedony, lapis lazuli) are found at different PGW sites in the doab. None of these stones, as raw material, are available in the doab. These items could have been obtained by trade. Agate and chalcedony are found in Kashmir, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh whereas lapis lazuli is to be found in Badakshan province in Afghanistan. Thus, the people inhabiting the PGW sites must have obtained these stones through trade or exchange with these regions.

Certain parallels in shape and size have been found between the PGW and potteries found in north-western India. Specially the Grey ware found in association with iron seems to indicate some links with the PGW cultures.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What are the characteristic features of BRW? Discuss in about ten lines the difference of the BRW found in various regions.

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- 2) On what basis we can say that the people inhabiting the PGW sites had trade links with other regions? Answer in about five lines.

10.6 NORTHERN BLACK POLISHED WARE CULTURE

Like the preceding cultures the Northern Black Polished Ware culture is identified by its distinctive pottery. This ware was first discovered at Taxila in 1930 and because of its black lustre its discoverer then took it as 'Greek Black Ware'. Since then nearly 1500 NBP sites have come to light. They expand from Taxila and Udgram in the north-west to Talmuk in east Bengal and Amravati (Andhra Pradesh) in the south. Out of these about 74 have been excavated.

Important Excavated NBP Sites

Name of Site	Name of State in which the site is located
Ropar	Punjab
Raja-Karna-ka-Qila	Haryana
Jodhpura	Northern
Noh	Rajasthan
Ahichchhatra	Uttar Pradesh
Hastinapura	
Atranjikhhera	
Kausambi	
Sravasti	
Vaisali	Bihar
Pataliputra	
Sonepur	
Chandraketugarh	West Bengal

The excavations have revealed that:

- at several sites NBP Ware culture succeeded PGW levels, and
- at some sites NBP succeeded BRW, and NBP is succeeded by Red Slipped Ware.

On the basis of the kind of pottery frequency and associated objects it has been suggested that two phases can be distinguished in the NBP Ware Culture.

Phase I: This phase is also referred to as the predefence phase. This is characterized by a predominance of NBP Ware and presence of shreds of BRW and PGW, though in meagre quantities. In this phase there is an absence of punch marked coins and burnt brick structures, which signify a higher level of development. This phase is represented in Atranjikhhera, Sravasti and Prahladpur.

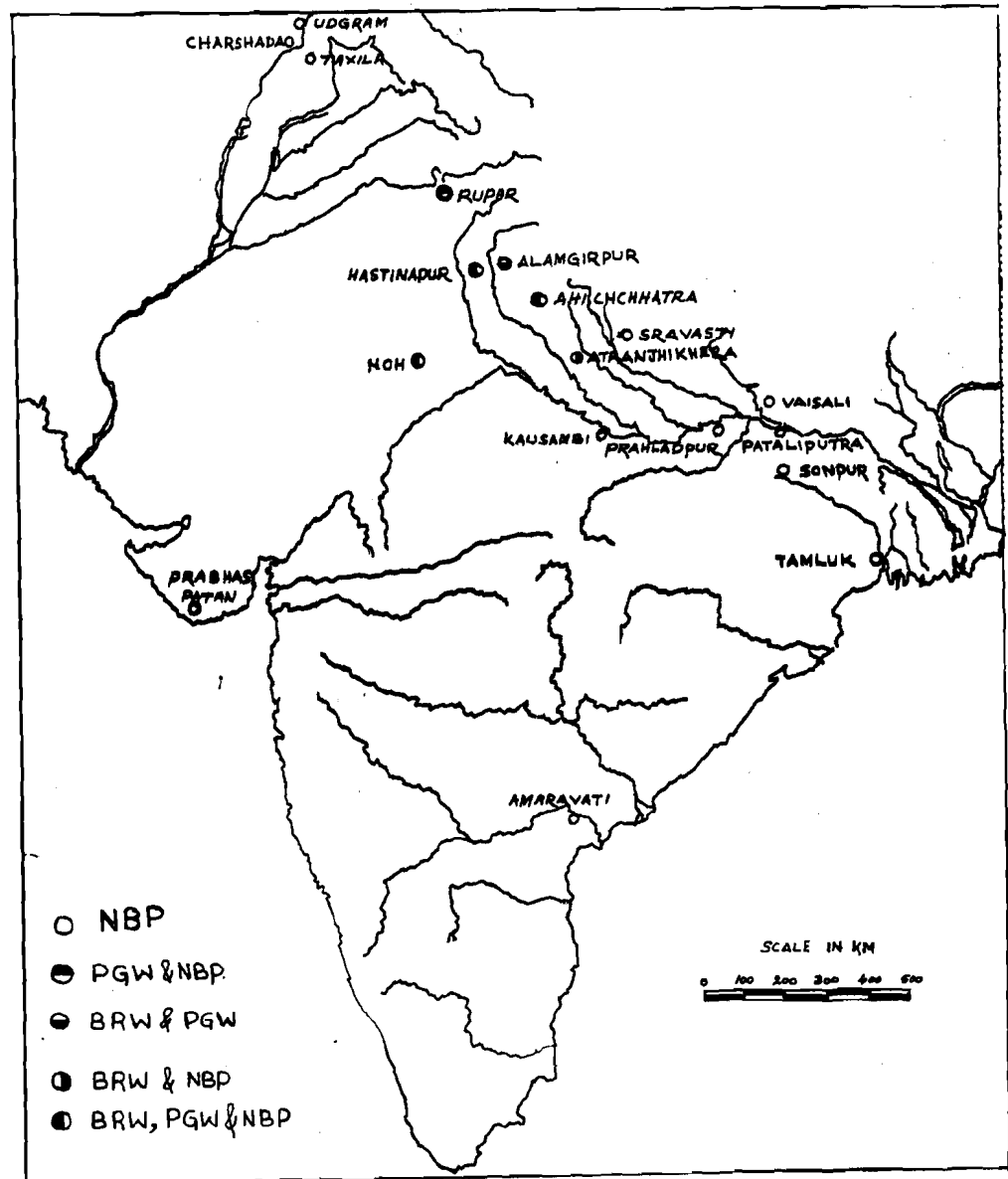
Phase II: Pottery specimens belonging to BRW and PGW are not found in this phase. NBP Ware is of poor quality (thicker in fabric) and is found in smaller numbers. A coarse grey ware comes into greater use. Punch marked coins and burnt bricks make their first appearance. This phase is represented in Hastinapura, Atranjikhhera, Sravasti II and Prahladpur.

Taking into account the similarities between NBP and PGW some scholars have suggested that the former is a refined form of the latter, and that the difference between the two appears to be confined only to the surface treatment. This has been proved through chemical analysis carried out on PGW, BRW and NBPW.

As the concentration of NBPW is in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, it is held that its origin lies somewhere in this region. It spread beyond the Ganga plains in later times, and such a spread is attributed to the activities of Buddhist monks and traders.

10.6.1 Structures

From the excavations at Hastinapura, Atranjikhhera and Kausambi it becomes evident that during this period building activities began on a large scale and that cities began to emerge.

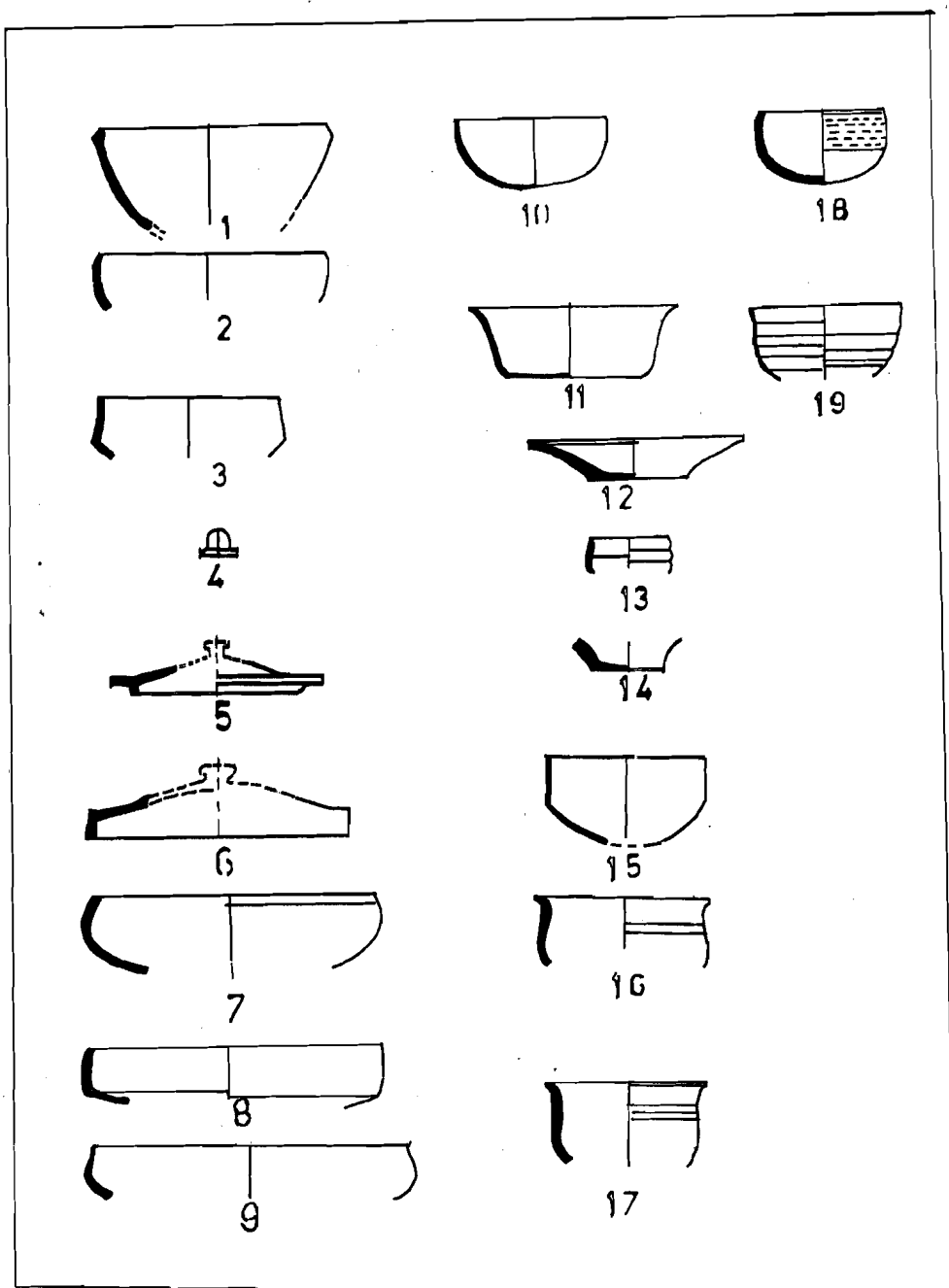


BRW, PGW, and the NBP were cultures

Excellent evidence of the settlement layout was unearthed at Kausambi. Here were

600 B.C. was relaid several times (varying in width between 5.5m and 2.5m) and continued to function upto 300 A.D. Houses were made of burnt bricks, and use of timber in house construction is evidenced by the post-holes and sockets for door jambs. The roofs of houses were covered with tiles. The rooms were square as well as rectangular. All this indicates a fairly planned building activity. This is further demonstrated from excavations at Hastinapura which have revealed an elaborate drainage system.

Some of the settlements were fortified with a mud or brick wall and moats were constructed encircling the fortification. The fortification wall at Kausambi had guard rooms, towers and gates at regular intervals.



An important question to be asked here is do these structures tell us anything about the social or political life in that period? They do. For example:

- the fortifications signify defensive measures against invasion and speak of political tensions,
- the drainage system, not only indicates the concern of the people towards hygiene but also the advance they had made in this regard, and
- large buildings like the fortifications require that a large number of people participate in construction activities. This might need an authority to mobilise the workers.

10.6.2 Pottery

The most characteristic feature of NBP Ware is its glossy surface. It is turned on a fast wheel and is made of well levigated clay. The core of the pottery in some cases is as thin as 1.5mm. In addition to the glossy black surface, the NBP Ware is also found in golden, silver, white, pinkish, steel blue, chocolate and brown colours. The recovery of rivetted pots (i.e. made by joining broken pieces) from some sites (e.g. Ropar, Sonapur) indicates how valuable the NBP Ware was. This along with the presence of other pottery types leads us to assume that NBP was a luxury ware not accessible to everybody and suggests to us that in the society in which NBP Ware was used society was divided into unequal groups.

Though NBP ware is generally unpainted, some painted shreds do occur. Painting is done using yellow and light vermilion colours. The common designs are simple bands, wavy lines, dots, concentric and intersecting circles, semi-circles, arches and loops. The most common pottery shapes are bowls and different kinds of dishes.

10.6.3 Other Objects

Several kinds of tools, weapons, ornaments and other objects made of copper, iron, gold, silver, stone, glass and bone have been recovered from NBP Ware sites. They reveal the technological progress achieved during this period which is further corroborated by early Buddhist texts, which mention a number of arts and crafts. The **Jatakas** refer to about 18 guilds, for instance, those of workers in wood, metal, stone, precious and semi-precious stones, ivory textiles, etc.

The copper objects found at many sites consist of chisels, knives, borers, pins, needles, antimony rods, nail parers, ferrules, reels and bangles.

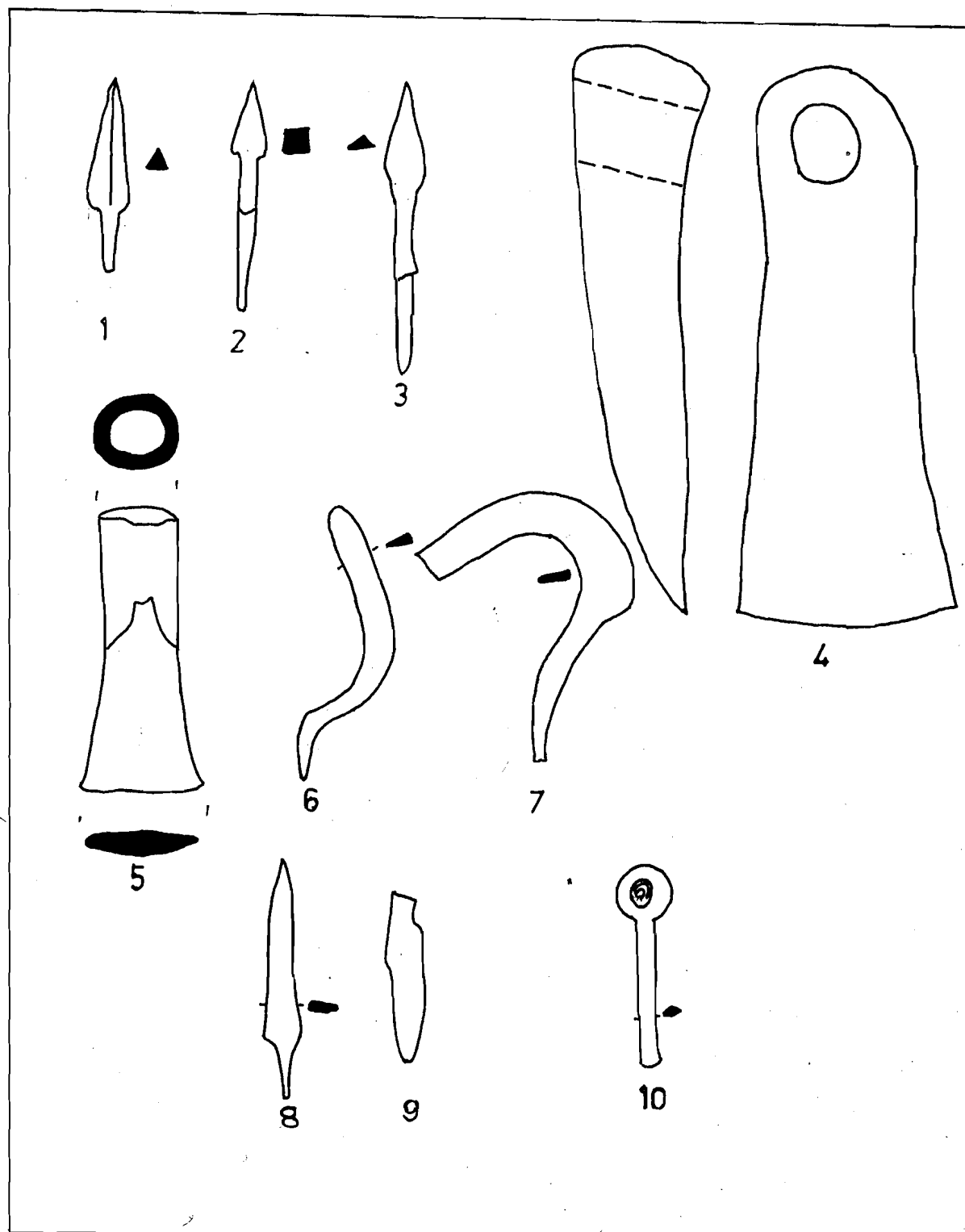
Iron objects not only preponderate but also exhibit a great variety in form when compared to the PGW period. The site of Kausambi alone has yielded 1,115 iron objects from deposits dating between Ca.800 B.C. to 550 A.D. These consist of:

- a) Agricultural implements like hoes and sickles, and tools of craftsman such as axes, adzes, chisels and screw rods.
- b) Weapons like arrowheads, javelinheads and spearheads.
- c) Miscellaneous objects which include knives, handles of different kinds, hooks, nails, rivets, fishplates, rings and miniature bells.

Silver punch-marked coins have been found from the middle phase of NBP culture. These indicate a possible shift from barter system to a system of exchange of goods through metallic currency.



Punch Marked Coins



Iron implements: 1-3. arrowheads; 4. adze; 5. hoe; 6-7. sickles; 8. dagger; 9. chisel

10.6.4 Ornaments

Beads made of semi-precious stones, glass, clay, copper shell and bone are most commonly found. The usual shapes are circular, spherical, biconical, cylindrical, barrel and square. Some beads are also etched. A single bead of gold is known from Kausambi IB (Ca. 300 B.C.).

Among the other ornaments are bangles made of terracotta, faience, glass, shell, stone and copper; finger rings of copper, iron, horn and clay; and pendants of terracotta, agate and carnelian. All these finds tell us about the:

- use of ornaments in that society
- existence of specialised craftsmen to make them

- level of technology for making them, and
- trade or exchange activities with other regions to procure various semi-precious stones.

10.6.5 Terracotta Figurines

These comprise human and animal figurines and miscellaneous objects.

Human figures, in most cases, are cast in moulds. Male figurines are usually plain excepting a few with a head dress. Female figurines have elaborate head dress, ear ornaments necklaces and girdles.

Animal figurines are hand modelled but well executed. These consist of horse, bull, ram and elephant.

The miscellaneous terracotta objects are toy carts, simple and animal headed gamesman; discs, balls, fleshrubbers and potter's stamps. At a later stage of this culture are found seals and sealings bearing inscriptions in **Brahmi** script. All these finds tell us a lot about the people who inhabited these sites. For example, toy carts tell us that carts were used as means of transportation.

10.6.6 Subsistence Economy and Trade

Archaeobotanical remains indicate that rice, wheat, barley, millet, pea and black gram were cultivated. And the animal remains found from some of the sites suggest dependence on cattle, sheep, goat, pig and fish.

In the occurrence of a diverse variety of beads, found to be common at several sites, is seen evidence of trade. On this basis it has been suggested that trade links existed between Taxila, Hastinapura, Ahichchhara, Sravasti and Kausambi during Ca. 600 B.C. to 200 B.C. Such a view is strengthened by the references made in Buddhist texts to trade guilds, and the caravans of camels, horses, mules, oxen and buffalos. Between the 6th and 3rd centuries B.C. there was trade between India and countries to the west. The main items of export were textiles, spices, and probably finished goods of iron and steel. From the Arthashastra (Book-II) it would appear that the state not only exercised control over trade but also had a monopoly over industries like gold, copper, iron, lead, tin, silver, diamond, gems and precious stones.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) From where does NBP Ware culture get its name? Answer in three lines.

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- 2) Which of the following statements are right or wrong. Mark (✓) or (×).
- a) NBP was a luxury ware.
 - b) It has been suggested that the NBP culture had four phases.
 - c) Literary evidence supports the archaeologists conclusions of trading activities during NBP period.
 - d) None of the NBP settlements had fortification.

10.7 CHALCOLITHIC CULTURES OF WESTERN, CENTRAL AND EASTERN INDIA

There were several local chalcolithic early farming cultures in western, central and eastern India which flourished during the second and first millennia B.C. These cultures were basically village settlements and they shared certain common elements. The distinctive features of these cultures are:

- painted pottery, which is mostly black-on-red, and
- a highly specialized stone blade/flake industry of siliceous stones.

Copper was known but its use was on a limited scale as the metal was scarce. The

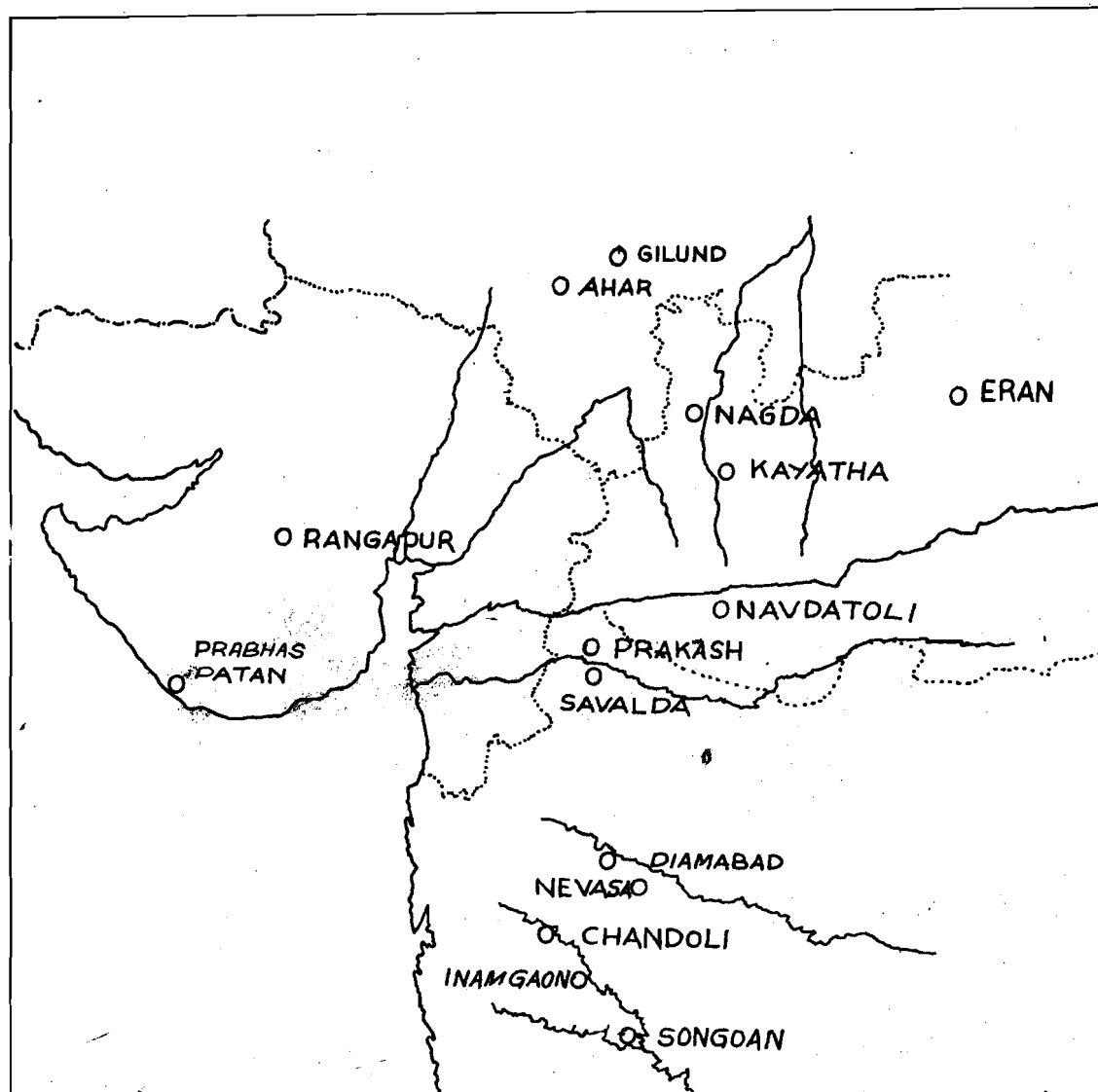
settlements consisted of circular and rectangular huts and in some cases pit dwellings are also known. The economy was based on farming and animal husbandry. These cultures are named after their type sites.

Chalcolithic Cultures

Name of the Culture	Period
Kayatha	2000 – 1800 B.C.
Ahar or Banas	2000 – 1400 B.C.
Savalda	2000 – 1800 B.C.
Malwa	1700 – 1200 B.C. in Central India and 1700 – 1400 B.C. in Maharashtra.
Prabhas	1800 – 1500 B.C.
Rangapur	1400 – 700 B.C.
Chirand	1500 – 750 B.C.

In the Tapi Valley of Maharashtra, Late Harappan non-urban habitations (about 50) are known (1800 – 1600 B.C.). The excavations at Daimabad have shown that the Late Harappans moved further south into the Pravara Valley (Maharashtra).

The Kayatha culture is named after the site of Kayatha (25 km. east of Ujjain) located on the bank of the Kalisindh, and affluent of the river Chambal. The Ahar or



Banas culture is named after the river Banas and its type site is Ahar (Udaipur in Rajasthan). More than 50 sites of this culture are known in the valleys of Banas and Berach in south-east Rajasthan. The type site of Savalda culture is Savalda (Dhulia district, Maharashtra). It is mostly confined to the Tapi valley but the evidence from Daimabad suggests that it reached up to the Pravara valley. The Malwa culture was discovered in the excavations at Maheshwar and Navadatoli (Nimar district, Madhya Pradesh) on the banks of Narmada. This culture is so named as a large number of sites were brought to light in the Malwa region. The Malwa people began to migrate to Maharashtra around Ca. 1600 B.C., and several settlements have been discovered in the Tapi, Godavari and Bhima valleys. Prakash (Dhulia district), Daimabad (Ahmednagar district) and Inamgaon (Pune district) were the most extensive settlements of the Malwa culture in Maharashtra. The Prabhas and Rangpur cultures, respectively, are known after the type sites Prabhas Patan and Rangpur in Gujarat. The type site of Jorwa culture is Jorwe (Ahmednagar district) in Maharashtra. Extensive occupations of the Jorwe culture succeed the Malwa culture at Prakash, Daimabad and Inamgaon.

Stone and Copper using agricultural communities have been reported from eastern India too. In northern Bihar at a place called Chirand remains of an ancient village settlement have been found. People lived in small houses made of bamboo and mud plaster. They ate rice and fish and hunted many wild animals. They too used black and red ware pottery. Similar kinds of settlements have been reported from Sahgaura in Gorakhpur (U.P.) and Sonpur in Gaya (Bihar) where people seen to have grown wheat and barley also. In West Bengal the sites of Pandu-Rajar-dhilu in the Burdwan district and Mahisdal in the Birbhum district have yielded similar evidences. All these settlements have been dated between 1500 to 750 B.C.

Let us examine the various characteristics of these cultures.

10.7.1 Pottery: Diagnostic Features

We will briefly review the pottery of these chalcolithic cultures.

The Kayatha ware is characterized by three fabrics:

- a thick and sturdy red slipped ware painted with designs in dark brown;
- a red painted buff ware (this ware is thin with a fine fabric); and
- a combed ware having incised patterns, and generally without a slip.

The majority of the pots of the sturdy red slipped ware have a ring base. The ring base recalls the pre-Harappan Sothi types.

Sothi culture (in Rajasthan) is known from several sites in the valley of Ghaggar (Sarasvati) which have yielded a pottery that is akin to the pre-Harappan pottery of Kalibangan.

There are seven kinds of wares in Ahar pottery but its most characteristic type is the black and red ware painted in white. The Savalda culture is characterised by a black-on-red painted pottery which is decorated with naturalistic designs such as birds, animals and fishes.

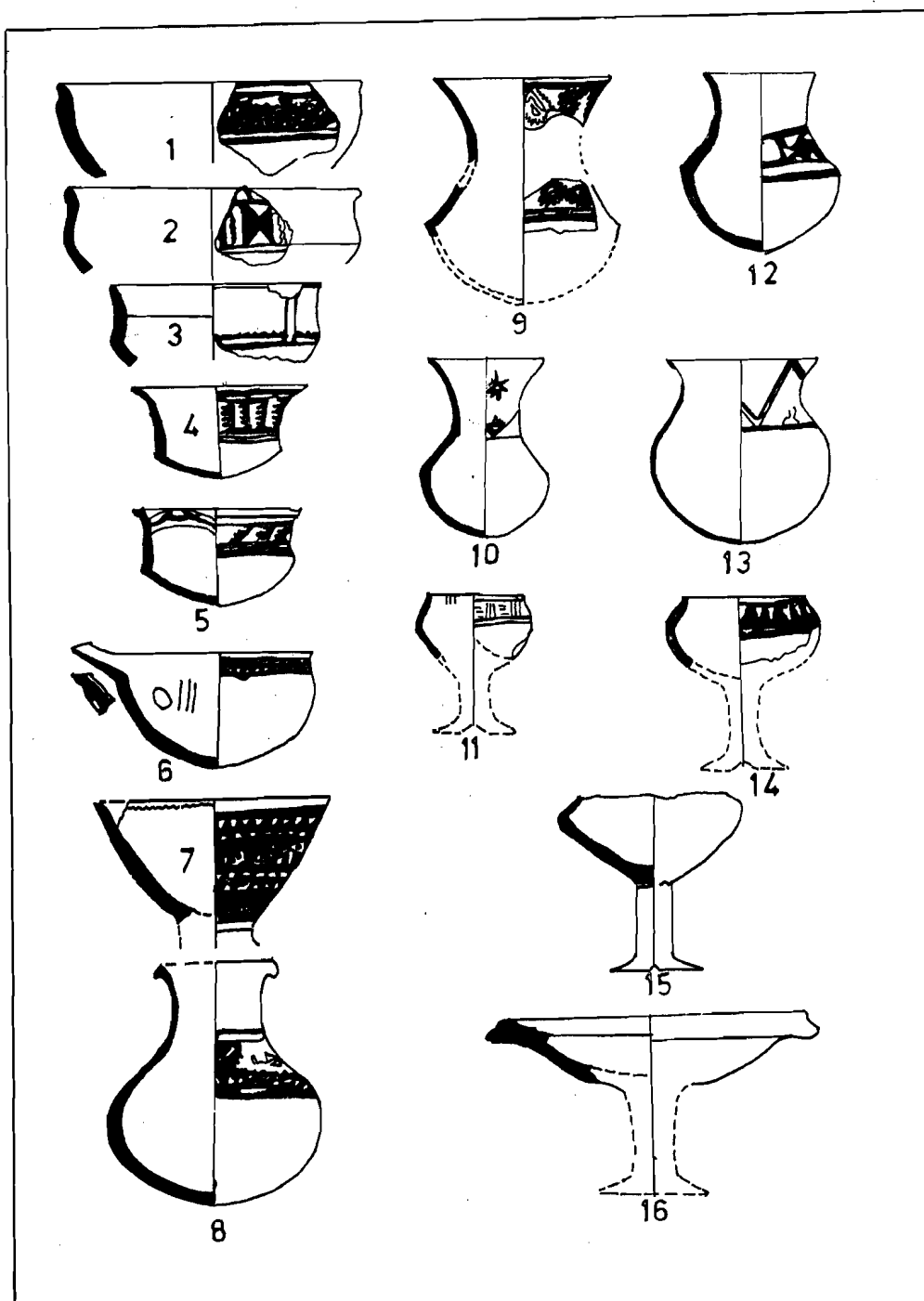
The Malwa ware is to some extent coarse in fabric and has a thick buff slip over which patterns are executed in black or dark brown colour.

The Prabhas and Rangpur wares are both derived from the Harappan black-on-red painted ware, but since the latter has a gloss it is referred to as the lustrous Red Ware.

The Jorwe Ware is painted black-on-red, and has a matt surface treated with a red wash.

In addition to these characteristic forms, all these cultures have other associated wares which are mostly red or grey. The pottery is wheel made but there are also hand made forms. The pottery shapes which are usual to these cultures are bowls, basins, globular jars with concave necks, dishes, *lotas* (a small pot with a carinated

body, a bulbous bottom and a flaring rim), etc. A distinctive feature of the Malwa pottery is seen in the series of small goblets on solid pedestals; and the distinctive forms of the Jorwe culture are carinated bowls, spouted jars with flaring mouths, and high necked globular vases.



Pottery of Malwa culture

10.7.2 Economy

A greater part of the region in which these chalcolithic cultures flourished is the zone of black cotton soil. The climate is semi-arid and the rainfall varies between 400 to 1000 mm. The mainstay of the economy of these chalcolithic cultures was subsistence agriculture and stock-raising. Dependence on wild game and other food sources such as fish is also attested to at several sites.

i) **Cultivated Crops:** Carbonized remains of seeds recovered in the excavations at some of the sites indicate that a variety of crops were raised by these farming communities. The main crops were barley, wheat, rice, bajra, jowar, lentil, horsegram, haycinth bean, grass pea, pea, black gram and green gram.

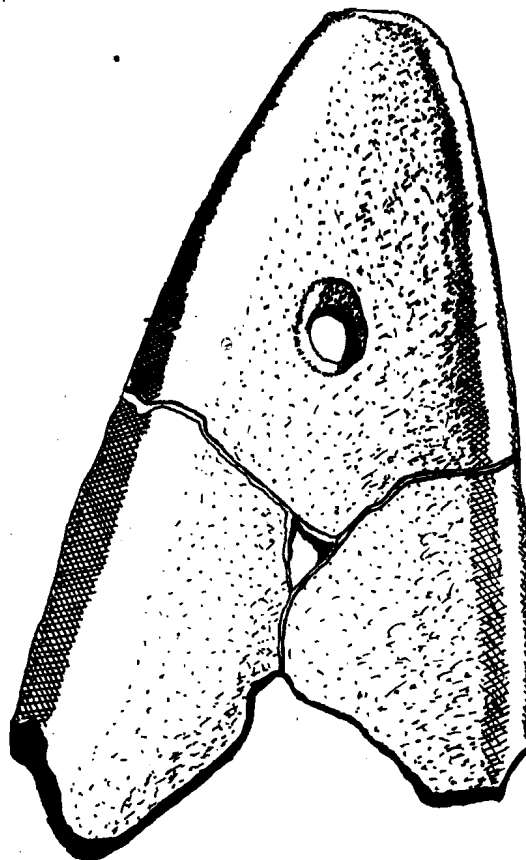
Other plants utilized were Jamun, Behada, wild date, ber, Myrobalan etc.

Barley was the principal cereal during this period. Evidence from Inamgaon suggests the practice of crop rotation, harvesting of summer and winter crops, and artificial irrigation. A massive embankment (240 m long and 2.40 m wide) was built at Inamgaon during Early Jorwe period (Ca. 1400 – 1000 B.C.) to divert the flood water through a channel (200 m long, 4m wide and 3.5 m deep).

That the black cotton soil was ploughed for farming operations is suggested by the find of an ard (Prototype of the ploughshare) made from the shoulder bone of cattle at Walki (not very far from Inamgaon).

ii) **Animals:** The excavations have revealed evidences of both domesticated as well as wild animals.

- i) The domesticated animals during the chalcolithic period were cattle, sheep, goat, dog, pig, horse. The bones of cattle and sheep/goat predominate at most of the sites. The cut and chop marks on the bones of these animal indicate that they were slaughtered for food. Age determination of these bones has indicated that most of the animals were slaughtered when they were young (ranging from three months to three years in age).
- ii) The wild species found are black buck, four horned antelope, Niligai, barasingha, sambar, chital, wild buffalo, and one horned rhinoceros.



Bones of fish, waterfowl, turtle and rodents have also been found at some of the sites. Bones of marine fish species have been found at Inamgaon and the source of these fish could be either Kalyan or Mahad, the nearest creek ports, 200 km. west of Inamgaon.

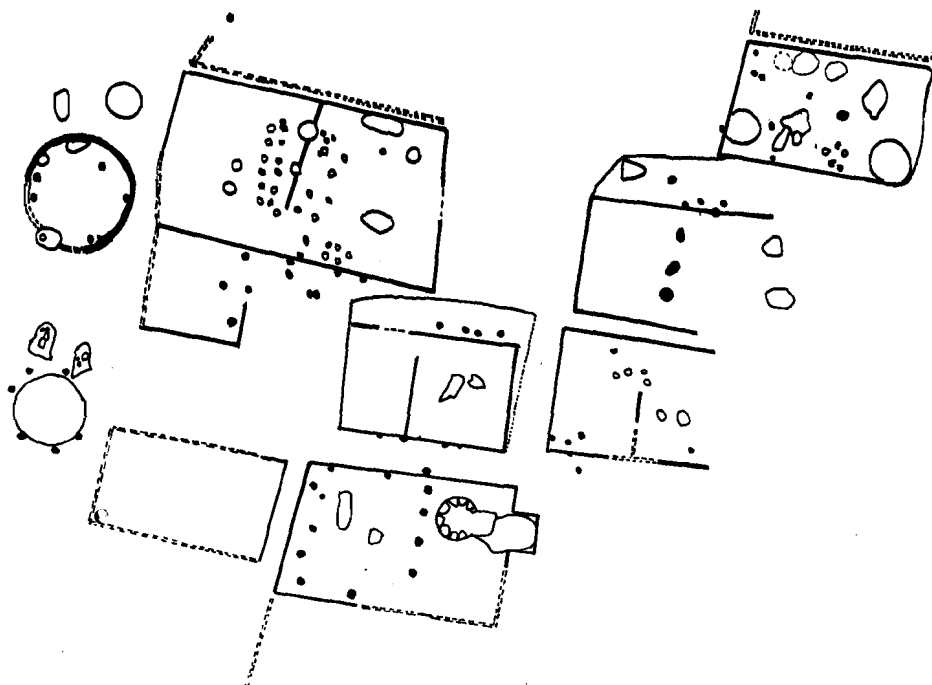
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The charred bones of both the domestic and wild species indicate that they were cooked in open fire.

10.7.3 Houses and Habitations

Let us briefly examine the housing patterns of these cultures. Rectangular and circular houses with mud walls and thatched roofs are the most common types, though there are variations in house sizes from site to site.

- i) Most of the houses of the Savalda culture were single roomed rectangular houses but there are some with two or three rooms. Ahar people built houses on plinths made of schist. Walls were built on these plinths with mud or mud brick and the walls were decorated with quartz cobbles; and floors were made of burnt clay or clay mixed with river gravels.
- ii) The sizes of the Ahar houses ranged between $7\text{m} \times 5\text{m}$ and $3\text{m} \times 3\text{m}$, and the longest house measured more than 10m in length. Bigger houses had partition walls, and **chulahs** (hearths) and quartzite saddle querns in the kitchen.
- iii) The Malwa settlements such as those found at Navadatoli, Parkash, Daimabad and Inamgaon were quite large. Evidence at Inamgaon suggests that some kind of planning was adopted in the laying out of the settlement. Of the 20 and odd houses exposed at Inamgaon, the majority were aligned in a roughly east-west orientation. Though these houses were built close to each other, they had an intervening space of about 1-2m in between which might have served as a lane. These houses at Inamgaon were large ($7\text{m} \times 5\text{m}$) rectangular structures with a



Plan of houses at Inamgaon during Malwa period

partition wall. The houses had a low mud wall and gabled roof. Inside the house was a large oval fire pit with raised sides for keeping the fire under control. The houses at Navadatoli were provided with one or two mouthed chullahs in the kitchen. The grain was stored in deep pit silos (1m in diameter and 1m deep). Circular mud platforms (1.5m in diameter) inside the houses suggest that they probably served as bases to keep bins of wicker work for grain storage.

- iv) A significant feature of the Jorwe culture (of which more than 200 sites are known so far, though the majority of them can be classified as villages ranging from 1 to 4 ha.) is the presence of a large centre in each region. These centres are Prakash, Daimabad and Inamgaon, respectively in the valleys of Tapi, Godavari and Bhima. The Jorwe settlement at Daimabad was the largest, covering an area from more than 30 hectares. Prakash and Inamgaon cover about 5 ha. each.
- v) A noteworthy feature of the Jorwe (both Early and Late) settlement at Inamgaon is that the houses of the artisans such as the potter, the goldsmith, the lapidary, the ivory-carver etc. were located on the western periphery of the principal habitation area, whereas those of well-to-do farmers were in the central part. The size of the artisans houses is smaller than those of the well-to-do. Both these aspects i.e. the position and size of houses demonstrate social differentiation in terms of a lower position for artisans in the society.

Interestingly enough, some of these chalcolithic sites have fortification walls around the settlement. For example Eran and Nagda (Madhya Pradesh) of the Malwa Culture, and Inamgaon (during Jorwe period) have a fortified mud wall with stone rubble bastions and ditch around the habitation.

At Inamgaon has been noticed a change in house types from Early Jorwe (1400 – 1000 B.C.) to late Jorwe period (1000 – 700 B.C.):

The Early Jorwe houses were large rectangular structures with low mud walls (about 30 cm. high) surrounded by wattle-and-daub constructions. These houses were laid out in rows with their longer axis in a roughly east-west orientation. These houses have an open space in between (approximately 1.5m wide) which might have served as a road or lane. The Late Jorwe houses on the other hand depict a picture of poverty. Large rectangular huts were no more built, and instead there were small round huts (with a low mud wall) in clusters of three or four. The pit silos were replaced by a fourlegged storage jar supported on four flat stones.

The overall evidence indicates that this shift from Early Jorwe to Late Jorwe was due to decline in agriculture as a result of drop in rainfall. Investigations in western and central India have disclosed that at the close of the second millennium B.C. there was a drastic climatic change in this region that led to increasing aridity forcing the people to resort to a semi-nomadic existence. This conclusion is based on calculations of percentages of animal bones found from different phases. It seems that increasing aridity during the Late Jorwe period led to the decline of agriculture, and economy based on farming changed over to sheep/goat pastoralism.

10.7.4 Other Characteristics

All these cultures are characterized by a stone blade/flake industry based on siliceous stones such as chalcedony, chert, jasper and agate. The tools include long parallel sided blades, blunted back blades, serrated blades, pen knives, lunates, triangles and trapezes. Some of these blade tools have a shine on the sharp edge suggesting that they were used for harvesting.

Polished stone axes, which are typical of the Neolithic-Chalcolithic cultures of Karnataka-Andhra, have also been found at some of these sites, though they are not

Copper objects consist of flat axes or celts with convex cutting edges, arrowheads, spearheads, chisels, fish hooks, mid-ribbed swords, blades, bangles, rings and beads. Among the finds at Kayatha, one pot contained 28 copper bangles. Some of these objects like the axe were cast in mould, while others were hammered to shape.

The most prolific item among the ornaments are beads made of carnelian, jasper, chalcedony, agate, shell, etc.

A necklace made of 40,000 microbeads of steatite has been found in a pot belonging to the Kayatha culture. At Inamgaon were found beads of gold and ivory, a spiral ear ring of gold and anklets of copper.

Terracotta objects are found frequently at majority of these sites. These are in the form of human and animal figurines. The stylized terracotta bulls (which are mostly miniature sized) found in the Chalcolithic levels at Kayatha, some with a prominent hump, some with horns twisted backward, and some with the horns projecting forward horizontally, are of special interest. Considering the occurrence of numerous terracotta bull figurines at several of these Chalcolithic sites it can be suggested that bull was a sacred animal, though the possibility that some of them could have been toys cannot be ruled out.

The Daimabad Hoard: By a chance discovery, four objects on the top of the mound (below which is a deposit, 1.2m thick belonging to the Jorwe period) came to light at Daimabad. These are massive, all solid cast, and weigh over 60 kg:

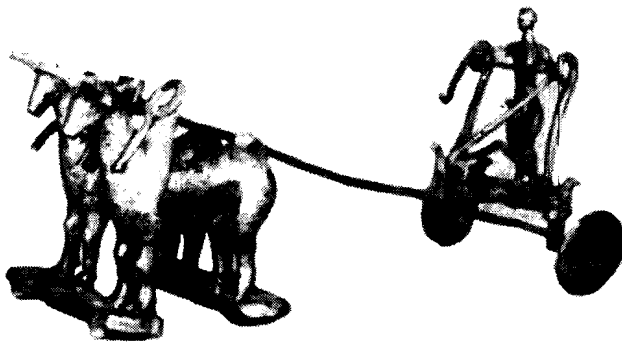
- i) **Elephant:** This is the heaviest (25 cm in height $\times$ 27 cm in length), and stands on a cast copper platform with four brackets beneath, pierced, to take axles.
- ii) **Rhinoceros:** This is a slightly smaller, and also stands on a cast platform. The brackets contain two solid copper axles with cast wheels attached. This rhinoceros recalls the one inscribed on the Indus seals.
- ii) **Two Wheeled Chariot with a Rider:** The chariot is attached by a long pole to the yoked oxen which stand on two cast copper strips, but there are no brackets for wheels. The chariot has two uprights supporting a cross-bar behind which the rider stands. This piece has no parallels.
- iv) **Buffalo:** This also has wheels and axle in position. This has some parallels in the figures of buffalos in both terracotta and case copper or bronze found from Mohenjodaro. The copper of the Daimabad hoard compares with that of other copper objects found in excavations, and spectrometric analysis of this metal has revealed that it is unalloyed by tin or other metals. According to one view the Daimabad hoard is datable to the Late Harappan period (Ca. 1600–1300 B.C.). Another suggestion is that they could probably belong to the same technological group as the Kallur hoard.



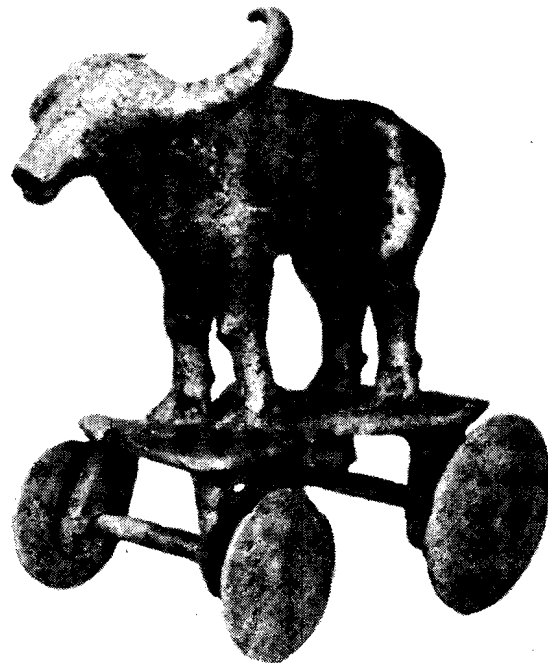
Copper Rhinoceros, Daimabad Hoard



Copper Elephant, Daimabad Hoard



Copper Chariot, Daimabod Hoard



Copper Buffalo, Daimabod Hoard

10.7.5 Religion/Belief Systems

The finds in the excavations also shed light on the religious practices and beliefs of the people.

i) **Mother Goddesses:** That these Chalcolithic communities had a belief in the mother goddess, and worshipped her, is attested by the finding of female figures of clay (both baked or unbaked). These female figures are both with heads and without heads. From the lower levels of occupation (dated to the middle of second millennium B.C.) at Nevasa, comes a large headless female figure, which is made without clearly showing physical features. Inamgaon has also yielded similar terracotta female figurines, which show no physical features except breasts.

Evidence for the worship of the mother goddess has been recorded in the excavations of an Early Jorwe house (1300 B.C.) at Inamgaon. Here buried under the floor in a corner, was found an oval shaped clay receptacle with a clay lid. Inside this receptacle was found a headless female figurine having large pendant breasts and also a bull figurine. These female figurines, including the one from Inamgaon point to the worship of the goddess of fertility. These figurines (especially the headless ones), according to one suggestion, may represent the goddess Sakambhari (of the early historic period), the goddess of vegetative fertility, who was worshipped for warding off draughts.

ii) **Gods:** Male figurines are rare in the Chalcolithic settlements. It has been suggested that the male figurines of clay (two of them being unbaked, and one baked) found in the Late Jorwe levels (1000 – 700 B.C.) at Inamgaon may possibly be identified as gods.

In this context a painted jar of Malwa period (1600 B.C.) is considered to be of some religious significance. This pot has two panels. In the upper panel is painted a scene depicting a human figure wearing a garment of twigs covering the loin, and is surrounded by stylized animals such as stag, deer, peacocks etc. The lower panel shows springing tigers or panthers, which are also stylized. This vessel, richly decorated with elaborate paintings, was probably meant for some ritualistic use. Likewise, finds of solid cast copper elephant, buffalo etc. at Daimabad could have religious functions.

ii) **Burial Practices:** Disposal of the dead by burial was a common custom. Adults as well as children were usually buried in a north-south orientation; the head towards the north and the legs towards the south. Adults were, in a majority of cases, buried in an extended position, whereas children were buried in urn-burials—either in single pots or, more often, in two pots—placed horizontally mouth-to-mouth in a pit.

Adults, and also children, were buried in a pit which was dug into the house floor, and rarely in the courtyard of the house. It is interesting to note that during the Jorwe period, in the case of adults, the portion below the ankle was purposely chopped off. These practices like burying the dead within the precincts of the house, and chopping off the feet could possibly suggest a belief in which the dead were restrained from turning into ghosts, who could become malevolent.

The adult burials in several cases contain offerings (grave goods) which are usually two pots, or sometimes more in number. One adult burial of the Late Jorwe period contained fifteen pots. It was also common to bury the dead with personal ornaments. In an adult burial of the Late Jorwe period, a large copper ornament was found near the neck of the skeleton. A child in a twin urn-burial of the same period had a necklace consisting of twelve beads of copper and red jasper alternately.

The Jorwe period has also disclosed some unusual burials at Inamgaon. Here has been found a four legged urn-burial made of unbaked clay, and its southern face resembles a human body. This urn (80 cm. in height and 50 cm. in width), which has a wide mouth with a featureless rim, contained the skeleton of a male, of about 30 to 40 years old, in a sitting posture. In this case, the portion below the ankle is not chopped off. The burial offerings were a spouted pot with the painting of a boat design having long oars. What this boat design reminds one is the present day Hindu belief that the departed soul has to cross waters in a ferry to reach the heavenly abode. This person who was given such an elaborate burial could be:

- of high status, or
- the ruling chief of the settlement, or
- belonging to a social group that practised a different kind of burial.

10.7.6 Social Organisation

In the chalcolithic culture regions, a study of the distribution pattern of the sites seems to suggest that these sites were of two types, one type representing regional centres and the other type representing village settlements. This difference, or hierarchy, has been taken to suggest that some form of administrative organisation was present in the chalcolithic cultures. This also suggests that the chalcolithic social organisation was characterised by ranking. The presence of an administrative authority is further supported by existence of public structures such as fortifications, rampart and moat, granaries, the embankment and canals (well documented at Inamgaon) etc. found at different sites.

Seen in the larger context of the post-Harappan developments, these chalcolithic cultures betray discernible influences of the Harappan culture, though in a residual form. All the same, they are marked by strong regional elements, and also display trade links and cultural contacts between each other.

These metal-using farming communities which flourished in the second millennium B.C. disappeared around the first millennium B.C. (excepting Late Jorwe which continued till 700 B.C.). One possible reason attributed for such a decay (on the basis of analyses of soil sample overlying these Chalcolithic horizons) was increasing aridity and unfavourable climatic conditions. Many of these settlements in the Godavari, Tapi and other valleys were deserted, and were reoccupied after a gap of six or five centuries in fifth-fourth centuries B.C., heralded by urbanisation.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - a) Chalcolithic Cultures of Western and Central India were city settlements.
 - b) Carbonized remains of seeds found in excavations indicate the variety of crops raised by the people.
 - c) The smaller size of artisan's house at Inamgaon demonstrates social differentiation.
 - d) There is no evidence of mother goddess worship.
 - e) At certain sites urns were used for burials.

- 2) What are the characteristics of Malwa settlements? Answer in about ten lines.

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- 3) Discuss in about five lines the characteristics of Daimabad Hoard.

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10.8 LET US SUM UP

By about 2000 B.C. agricultural communities came into existence in different parts of India. These agriculturists used tools and implements made of stone and copper. In North India these communities used various kinds of potteries like the OCP and BRW. A variety of copper tools have also been discovered. In Central India and Maharashtra Black soil zone excavations have shown the existence of the Kayatha, Malwa and Jorwe cultures. By about 750 B.C. many of these agricultural communities adopted iron technology. The chalcolithic communities showed distinct variations in their pottery tradition. The iron age potteries called the PGW and the NBPW were used over a larger area. During this period there was greater interaction among various communities and a transition towards urbanisation was taking place.

The finds at the sites belonging to different cultures give detailed information about settlement patterns, trade links, types of tools and ornaments and religious beliefs etc.

10.9 KEY WORDS

Archaeobotany : Study of the remains of plants.

Arthashastra: A book traditionally attributed to Kautilya the minister of Chandragupta who ruled in the fourth-third centuries B.C.

Brahmi Script: The earliest known script of historical India. Ashoka's inscription were written in the same script. Most of modern Indian scripts like Tamil, Devanagiri etc. are derived from it.

Chalcolithic: Refers to communities which used copper and stone tools.

Jatakas: Stories relating to the previous births of the Buddha.

Mound: Remains left by people of the past which look like heaped up embankment on the relief.

Pit Dwelling: A practice of making homes beneath the surface of the earth. Dwelling spaces used to be dug beneath the floor.

Punch Marked Coins: Coins made of copper and silver which came to be used around the sixth-fifth century B.C. They are the earliest known coins of India.

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Mortuary Practice: The practice of the disposed of the dead.

Thermoluminescence Dating: A scientific method of dating ceramic material.

Type Site: The site where a particular culture was first identified.

10.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include the kind of pottery and its features; structures;; crops; area of this culture etc. See Sec. 10.2.
- 2) a) × b) × c) × d) ✓

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should include the colour of the pottery, its making technique and the difference in BRW of different regions like the doab BRW is of plain surface while Gilund and Ahar BRW is painted etc. See Sec. 10.4
- 2) Here take for example the kind of semi-precious stones found. Since these were not available locally they were obtained through trade. See Sec. 10.5.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) NBP Ware Culture got its name from the distinctive pottery type which is associated with this period. See Sec. 10.6.
- 2) a) ✓ b) × c) ✓ d) ×

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) a) ✓ b) × c) ✓ d) × e) ✓
- 2) There are quite large settlements, with evidence of layout planning. You should mention their planning and other features like Oval fire pits, deep pit sites etc. See Sub-sec. 10.7.3.
- 3) This was a chance discovery. Mention the objects and their characteristics. See Sub-sec. 10.7.4.

UNIT 11 CHALCOLITHIC AND EARLY IRON AGE -II

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Early Farming Settlements
 - 11.2.1 Cultural Phases
 - 11.2.2 Subsistence Economy
 - 11.2.3 Material Culture
 - 11.2.4 Burial Practices
- 11.3 Neolithic Surface Finds
- 11.4 Iron Age in South India
 - 11.4.1 Megalithic Cultures
 - 11.4.2 Origins of the Megalithic Cultures
 - 11.4.3 Material Culture
 - 11.4.4 Subsistence Economy
- 11.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.6 Key Words
- 11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

11.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with the early farming communities and the subsequent Iron Age in the region of South India. After reading this unit, you will be able to know about:

- the successive phases of the early farming culture of southern India and their salient features,
- the nature of settlements, economy and other traits of these cultures, and
- the characteristic features of the Early Iron Age in this region.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

By now you must be well familiar with the evolution of human beings from hunter-gatherers into settled agricultural communities. You have also learnt about the existence of the Harappan Civilisation and the various aspects related to it. In the previous unit you have seen how different cultures emerged following the decline of the Harappan Civilisation, covering the time span from the second millennium B.C. to first millennium B.C. In this unit, we will review the developments in south India during the same period. The focus of the study will be on the nature of the changes that came about in this period in material culture, in settlement patterns and social organisation.

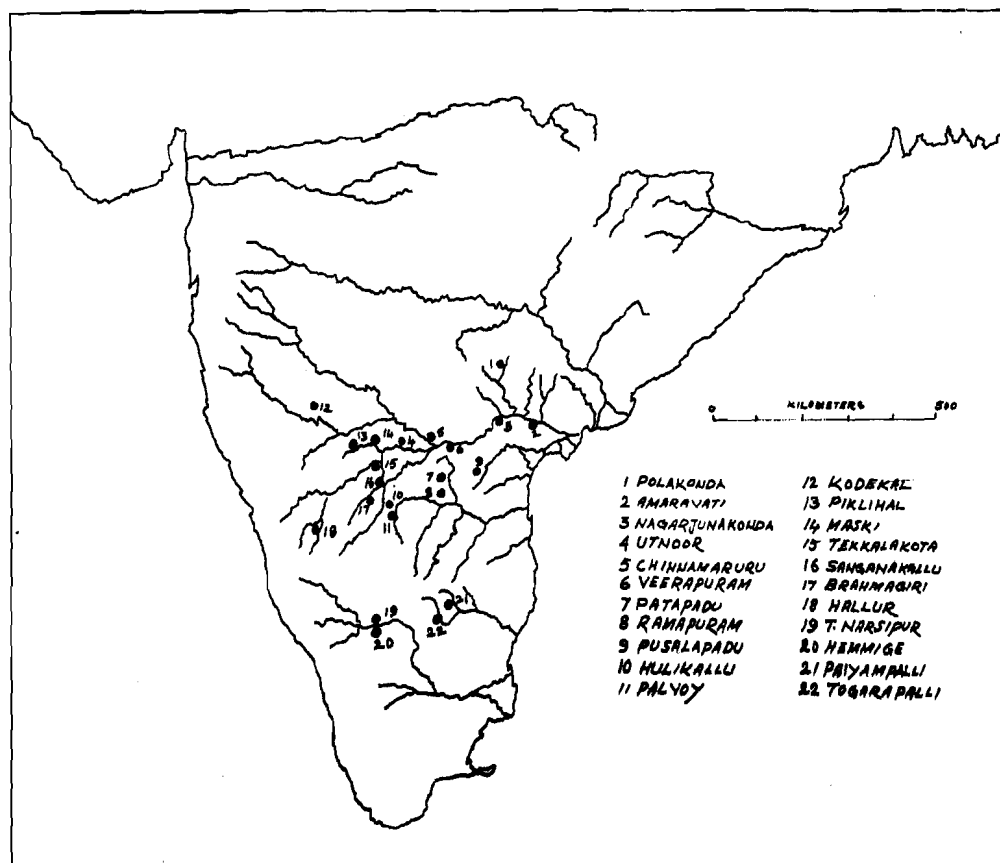
11.2 EARLY FARMING SETTLEMENTS

Settlements of the early farming communities in south India make a rather sudden appearance in the third millennium B.C. There is no evidence to discern a gradual evolution (as in West Asia) from a hunting-gathering economy to a food producing economy. The evidence for this region indicates some sort of colonization of favourable habitats in the Godavari, Krishna, Tungabhadra, Penneru and Kaveri river systems. These settlements, in majority of the cases, are scattered in the semi-arid, low rain fall and sandy loamy regions which are suitable for dry farming and pastoralism (cattle, sheep and goat). The distinguishing features of these settlements are:

- i) Sedentary village settlements with semi-permanent to permanent structures, the latter consisting of wattle and daub.
- ii) Stone axes (made of hard rocks like dolerite and basalt) manufactured by

grinding and polishing. Because of this technique the stone tool industry of these early farming cultures is referred to as the polished stone axe industry.

- iii) Long and thin blades made of fine grained rocks like chert, jasper, chalcedony and agate. These artefacts have a sheen on the cutting edge, indicating that they were used for harvesting crops.
- iv) Pottery which is hand made in the early stages and wheel made in the later stages.
- v) An economy based on millet farming, and cattle and sheep/goat pastoralism. The economy, thus, is basically agro-pastoral.
- vi) The dietary needs are supplemented by wild game.



Important Neolithic-Chalcolithic sites in South India

11.2.1 Cultural Phases

On the basis of the overall evidence, we can distinguish three broad phases in the growth of the early farming communities in south India.

Phase I: The earliest settlements of these farming communities represent this phase. These were made on tops of granitoid hills, or on levelled terraces on hill sides, or in the valleys between two or more hills. The material culture consists of a polished stone axe industry, blade industry and handmade pottery.

In pottery, grey or buff-brown ware is most common. A ware, which is less common, has a black or red burnished slip, often with purple painted decorations. These earliest settlements are associated with ash mounds some of which were excavated. These excavated ash mound sites like Utnur, Kungel, Kodekal, Bellanac, Piddilhal,

Maski and Brahmagiri have all revealed the first phase of settlements of these agro-pastoral communities. This phase can be ascribed between 2500-1800 B.C. on the basis of radiocarbon dates.

Phase II: The settlement pattern of Phase-I continues without any change: settlements were still made on top of granitic hills, or on levelled surfaces on the hillsides. Nonetheless, there are some important developments. The settlements had circular hutments of wattle and daub on wooden frames with mud floors. Some of the larger pits at Nagarjuna-Konda (in coastal Andhradesa) which are circular, oval, oblong and irregular, with post holes are interpreted as semi-subterranean pit dwellings. Pit dwellings were also found at Paiyampalli and Veerapuram. In this phase new pottery types like the perforated and spouted vessels appeared. The discovery of such pottery types reveals contacts with regions in the north as similar pottery types have been found there. The technique of roughening the outer surface of pottery during this phase is reminiscent of technique employed in the early Harappan period.

The polished stone axe and blade industries proliferated in this phase. Copper and bronze objects were also discovered for the first time and their numbers increased towards the end of this phase. Some of the sites where the Phase-II settlements were discovered are Piklihal, Brahmagiri, Sanganakallu, Tekkalakota, Hallur and T. Narsipur. The available radiocarbon dates for this phase suggest a timespan covering 1800-1500 B.C.

Phase III: The important development in this phase is the increase in the number of copper and bronze tools. Such an increase is seen at Tekkalakota, Hallur, Piklihal, Sanganakallu, Brahmagiri and Paiyampalli. The stone axe and blade industries continue. In pottery a new grey and buff ware with a harder surface becomes common.

Another ceramic type which is wheel made, unburnished and with purple paint also appears. This ware has affinities to the chalcolithic Jorwe ware of Maharashtra. On these grounds this phase can be ascribed to the period 1400-1050 B.C.

These three phases reveal how gradually the early farming-cum-pastoral settlements in south India emerged and expanded. There is continuity of occupation from Phase I to Phase III (as revealed at some sites in the excavations) and with no significant change in the economy. The only important difference is the absence of copper/bronze tools in Phase I. As the occupation of Phases II and III have yielded these metal tools, they are designated as Neolithic-Chalcolithic.

From the distribution of these settlements, it can be seen that the preferred landforms are low hill ranges away from major watersheds but in proximity to streams; the soil zones are tropical black clays, tropical red and black sandy loams, sandy or sandy loamy ferruginous tropical soils, and deltaic alluvium. The average annual rainfall in which these settlements are located, as at present, falls in the range of 600-1200 mm. These sites are commonly dispersed in the castellated hills and the habitations are usually on the tops of hills or at the foot of hills.

11.2.2 Subsistence Economy

In view of the location of the sites in relation to physiography, it would appear that areas which were suited largely for gravity flow irrigation were generally colonised. However, there are some sites like Veerapuram on the bank of Krishna, Hallur on the Tungabhadra, T. Narsipur at the confluence of the Kaveri and Kapila and those in the alluvial zones of the Krishna, where there is scope for water management through canal irrigation.

The available archaeobotanical evidence indicates that millets and pulses were the main cultivated crops. These are various kinds of millet, horse gram, green gram and

black gram. Hyacinth bean and barley have been recently identified at Ramapuram.

Coming to the fauna, almost all the excavated Neolithic-Chalcolithic sites yielded remains which belong to both domesticated and wild species.

The domesticated species consist of cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat, pig, dog and fowl. Cattle predominate at the majority of the sites indicating its importance in the economy of these communities. For instance in the Neolithic levels at Veerapuram, the faunal remains of which were subjected to meticulous study, cattle represent 48.68% of the domesticated animals whereas sheep/goat form only 5.4.%. If such was the case at Veerapuram situated on the right bank of the Krishna with potential for irrigation agriculture, then one should expect cattle pastoralism to have played a major role in the scores of sites located in the uplands. As the economy of these communities was a combination of agriculture and animal husbandry (cattle predominantly and sheep/goat to some extent), it can be termed **agro-pastoral**.

In addition to these domesticated species these settlements have also yielded remains of wild game. These wild species are porcupine, black naped hare, nilgai, chinkara, blackbuck, sambar and chital. This would indicate that their meat requirements were supplemented by wild game.

11.2.3 Material Culture

The material remains of this period include pottery, stone artefacts, copper/bronze object and other objects.

i) Pottery

Pottery in Phase I (2500-1800 B.C.) was predominantly handmade, grey or buff-brown. This grey ware is characterized by the use of bands of red ochre, applied after firing. What is interesting is that some of these pottery forms have applied ring feet and hollow pedestals which recall the pre-Harrappan types known from Amri and Kalibangan. The other ceramic type of Phase I had a black or red burnished slip, with a purple painted decoration.

In Phase II (1800-1500 B.C.) the red and black slipped wares disappear and new types occur. These new are perforated vessels, and vessels with spouts. In ceramic manufacture, the technique of roughening the outer surface of vessels is used, and this recalls the one employed in the pre-Harappan levels of Baluchistan.

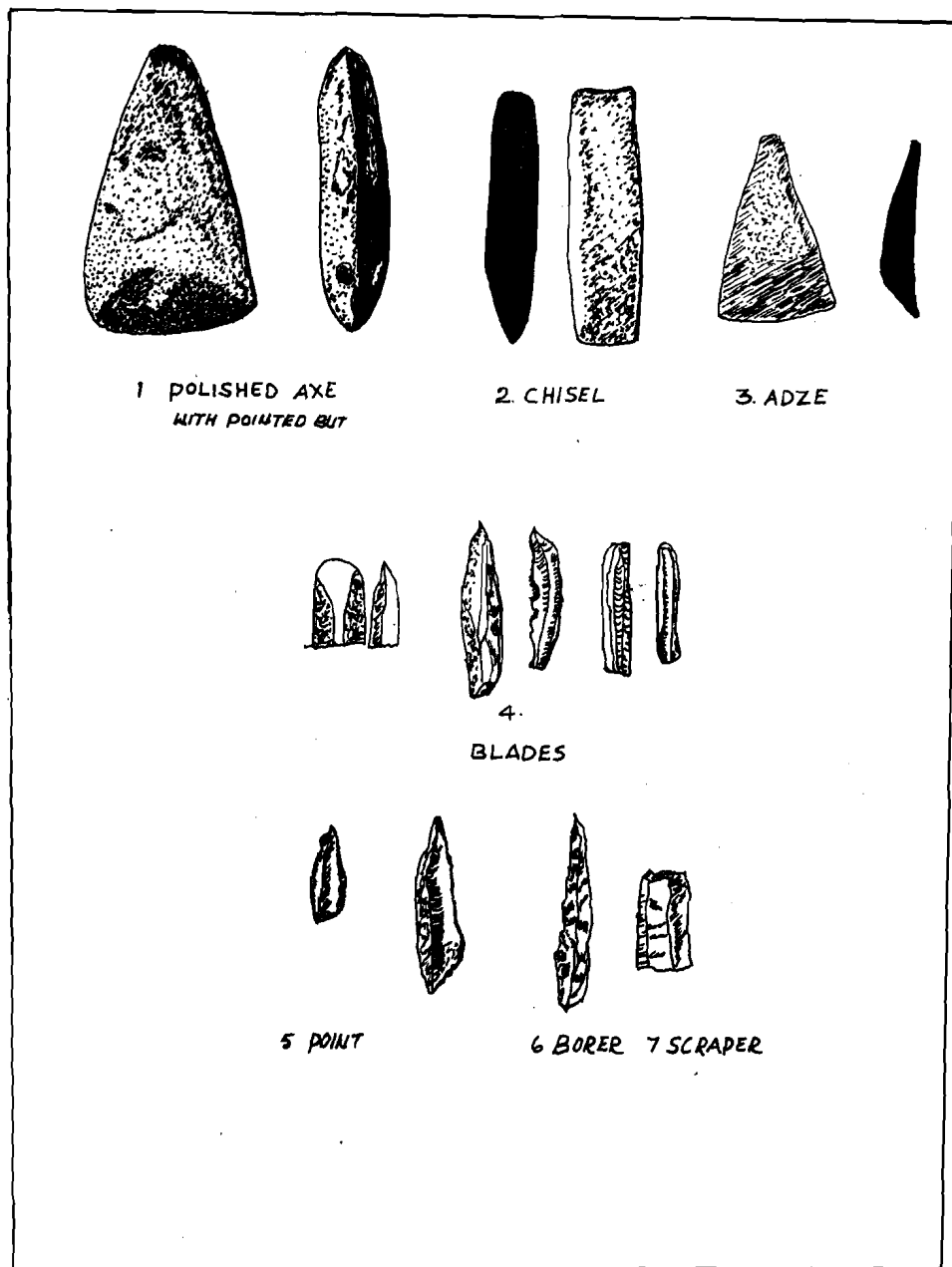
In Phase III (1400-1050 B.C.) new ceramic types occur:

- a) a grey and buff ware with a harder surface and
- b) a wheel thrown unburnished ware with purple paint. This latter type displays affinities with the Jorwe type of Maharashtra, thus indicating cultural contacts between the southern Deccan and the northern Deccan. The pottery forms are various kinds of bowls (bowls with lips, lugs and spouts), handled and hollow footed bowls, jars, dishes on stand, perforated vessels, and spouted vessels.

ii) Stone Tools and Bone Artefacts

The stone blade industry consists of long and thin parallel sided blades, some of which are finished into other forms by retouch. These finished forms are crescents, triangles, trapezes, serrated blades etc. Some of the parallel sided blades show a gloss on the cutting edge which is due to their use in harvesting activities.

Many stone tools were also polished. The most common type of the polished or ground stone axe industry is the triangular axe with a pointed buff and oval cross section. The other forms are adges, scrappers, wedges, chisels and pointed tools (termed as picks).



Neolithic blade and polished stone axe industry in south India

Besides these the other stone objects comprise hammerstones, sling balls, grinding stones, rubbing stones and querns. The latter were used in foodgrain processing.

Among the Bone artefacts, worked bone, horn and occasionally antler and shell have been found at some of the excavated sites. The most common artefacts are a variety of points and chisels. One site (Pallavoy) has yielded bone axes, made from cattle scapulae finished by grinding at the worked edge.

iii) Metal Objects

As noted earlier, copper and bronze tools appear in Phase II and increase in Phase III. The most important of these are flat axes and chisels which are reminiscent of those of Malwa and Maharashtra. The other interesting find is the antenna sword found at Kallur (discussed in Unit 10 in the context of Copper Hoards).

The other items of copper/bronze, which are known from various excavated sites are bangles, spiral ear rings and antimony rods. A fish hook has been recovered from Hallur. The site Tekkalakota has yielded a spiral ear ring of gold.

iv) Beads and Terracotta figurines

Beads made of semi-precious stones have occasionally been found at some of the

excavated sites. For example circular disc beads of paste and steatite were discovered at Nagarjunakonda.

Terracotta figurines, predominantly of humped cattle, have been recovered from excavated sites like Piklihal.

These, seen in the context of paintings, of cattle around the settlements at Kupgal, Maski, Piklihal etc. are suggestive of the significance attached to cattle in their culture. These paintings show cattle, singly and in groups, and depict humped bulls and long horned cattle. Some show cattle with decorated horns.

11.2.4 Burial Practices

The dead were commonly buried within the houses. Adult burial practices include extended inhumation.

Infants were buried in urns. Excavations at Tekkalakota revealed (in Phase III) multiple pot burials, which recall the Jorwe burials of Maharashtra. A Neolithic cemetery is reported at Nagarjunakonda. The offerings for the dead (grave goods) usually consisted of pots, including spouted vessels, and in some cases stone axes and stone blades.

11.3 NEOLITHIC SURFACE FINDS

Apart from being found in habitation sites, polished stone axes occur in small isolated assemblages, in forested regions. Such occurrences are common in south India, and often, there is a habitation site nearby. What do such occurrences indicate? Such findspots probably represent activity loci. This is to say considering the functional use of the tools (axes for tree felling) these findspots indicate vegetation clearance in the hilly forested zones for dry farming operations.

Such isolated Neolithic stone axe clusters are common in the wooded hill ranges of Tamil Nadu: Slevory, Javadi and Tirumalai hilly zones. Such a distribution of Neolithic axe clusters from the wooded uplands of the southern extensions of the Western Ghats to the lowland Tamil plains, is suggestive of shifting cultivation practices, which was prevalent till recently in the southern part of the Western Ghats.

The south Indian Neolithic is also associated with ash mounds which are distributed in the semi-arid parts of the Bhima-Krishna-Tungabhadra doab. More than 60 ash mounds are known and some of them are quite extensive. It was suggested by some archaeologists that these mounds were produced by the burning of cow dung by the Neolithic communities, and that they were the sites of cattle pens where dung was allowed to accumulate. Raymond Allchin in the light of evidence he obtained from his excavations at Utnur (an ash mound site) concluded that they were associated with forest cattle stations of the Neolithic people and that the burning probably had ritualistic significance.

As mentioned earlier, there is no evidence to prove the evolution of village farming communities from the preceding hunting-gathering economy, in south India. As we have seen a sudden spurt in the emergence the village settlements started from around the middle of the third millennium B.C. in these areas. How did these farming settlements come into existence? According to some archaeologists, the grey ware exhibits broad similarities with that found at sites like Hissar, Turang Tepe and Shah Tepe in north east Iran; and the red and black painted pottery has affinities with the pre-Harappan pottery of Baluchistan and the Indus system. On the basis of these similarities, and considering some other features, they have suggested that the origin of south Indian Neolithic cultures may have had links with some centres in the Indo-Iranian borderlands.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - i) It is not possible to divide the material culture of the settlements in South India in various phases.
 - ii) Among the domestic species, cattle played a very important role in the economy of the early farming communities of south India.
 - iii) The burial practices were the same for the infants as well as the grown ups.
 - iv) We get no evidence of any bone artefacts from any of the excavated sites.

- 2) Write ten lines on the cultural phases of the early farming communities in South India.

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- 3) Can the economy of the farming communities of South India be characterised as Agro-pastoral? Write in five lines.

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- 4) What did the ash mounds discovered at various sites signify? Write in five lines.

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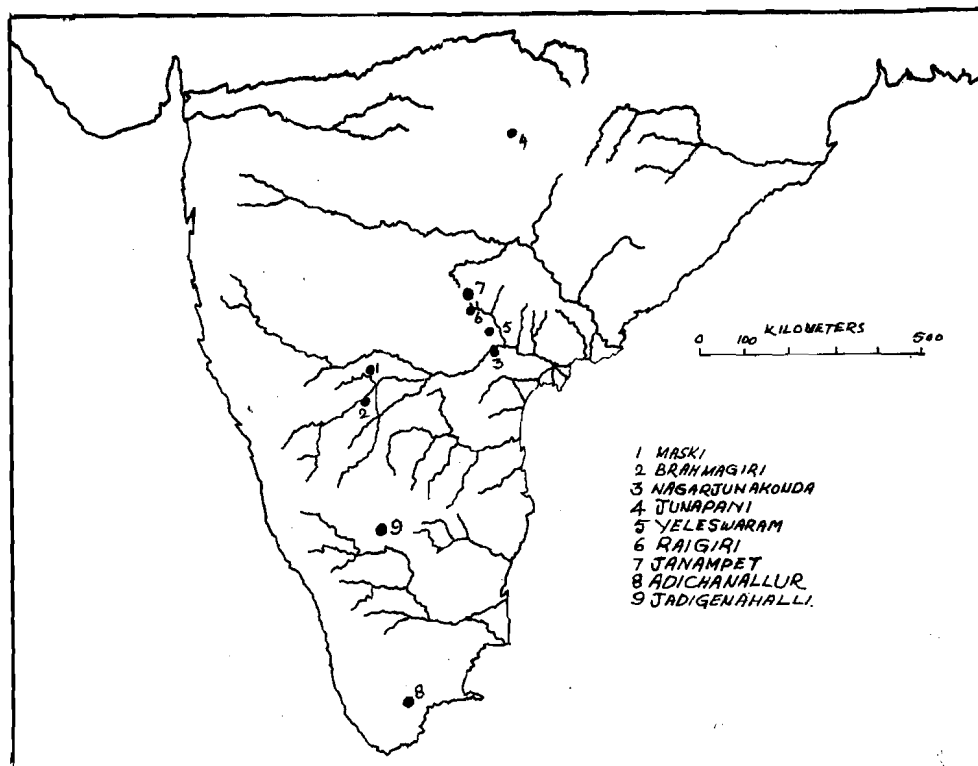
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11.4 IRON AGE IN SOUTH INDIA

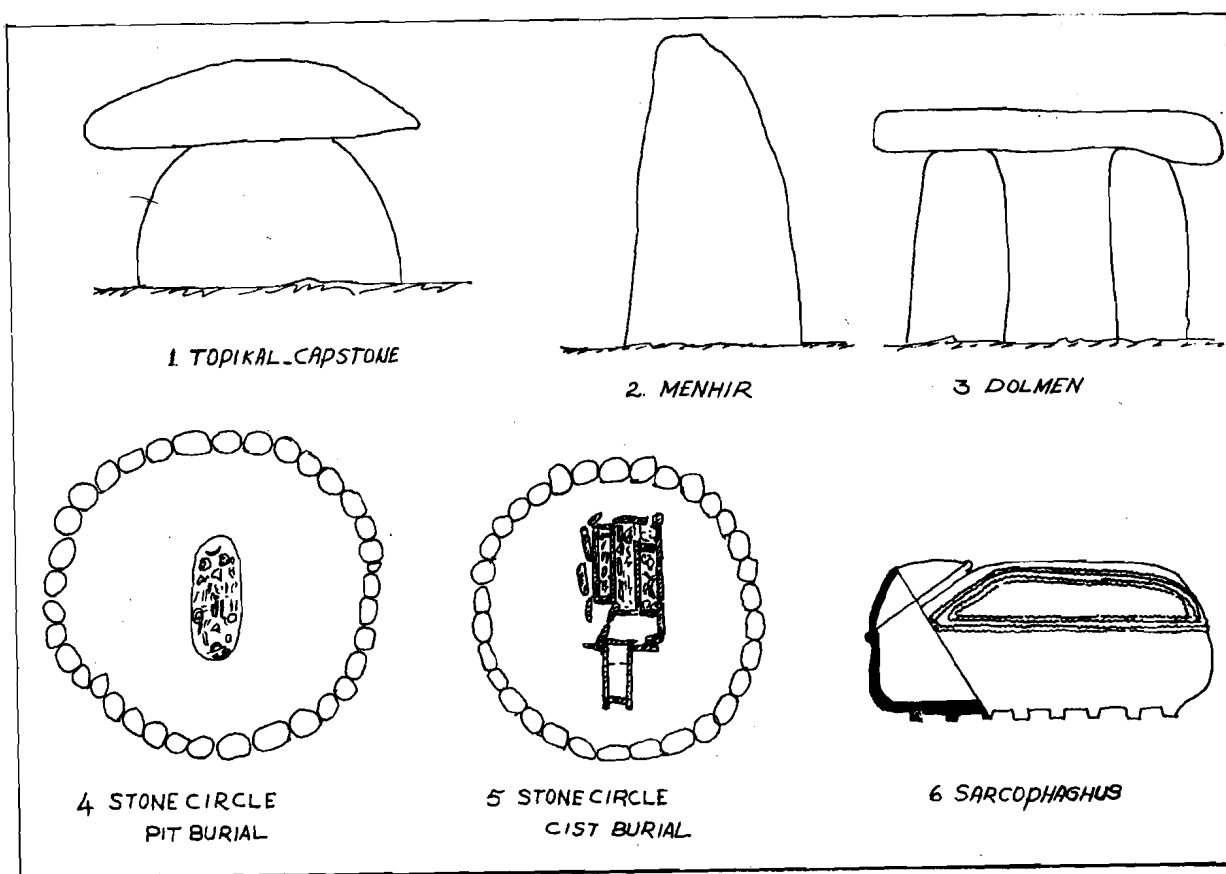
The use of iron in South India began sometime around 1100 B.C. This date has been



suggested on the basis of the radiocarbon analysis of objects found at Hallur. However, at some of the other sites discussed earlier, we find that the Neolithic-Chalcolithic cultural horizons overlap with Iron Age levels. In Northern Deccan (Maharashtra) also the occupations at several chalcolithic settlements continue into the Iron Age and it is the same case at sites like Brahmagiri, Piklihal, Sanganakallu, Maski, Paiyampalli, etc. in southern Deccan.

The earliest phase of Iron Age in south India is recovered in the excavations at Piklihal and Hallur and possibly by the burial pits at Brahmagiri. These early burials yielded the first iron objects, black-and-red ware, and a matt painted buff and red ware. To some extent the latter is similar to the Jorwe ware. Similar evidence has been recorded in the burials at Tekwada (Maharashtra). At some sites, in the habitations, stone axes and blades continued to be used. The succeeding phase is characterised by a predominance of burnished unpainted black-and-red ware, and red or black wares.

11.4.1 Megalithic Cultures

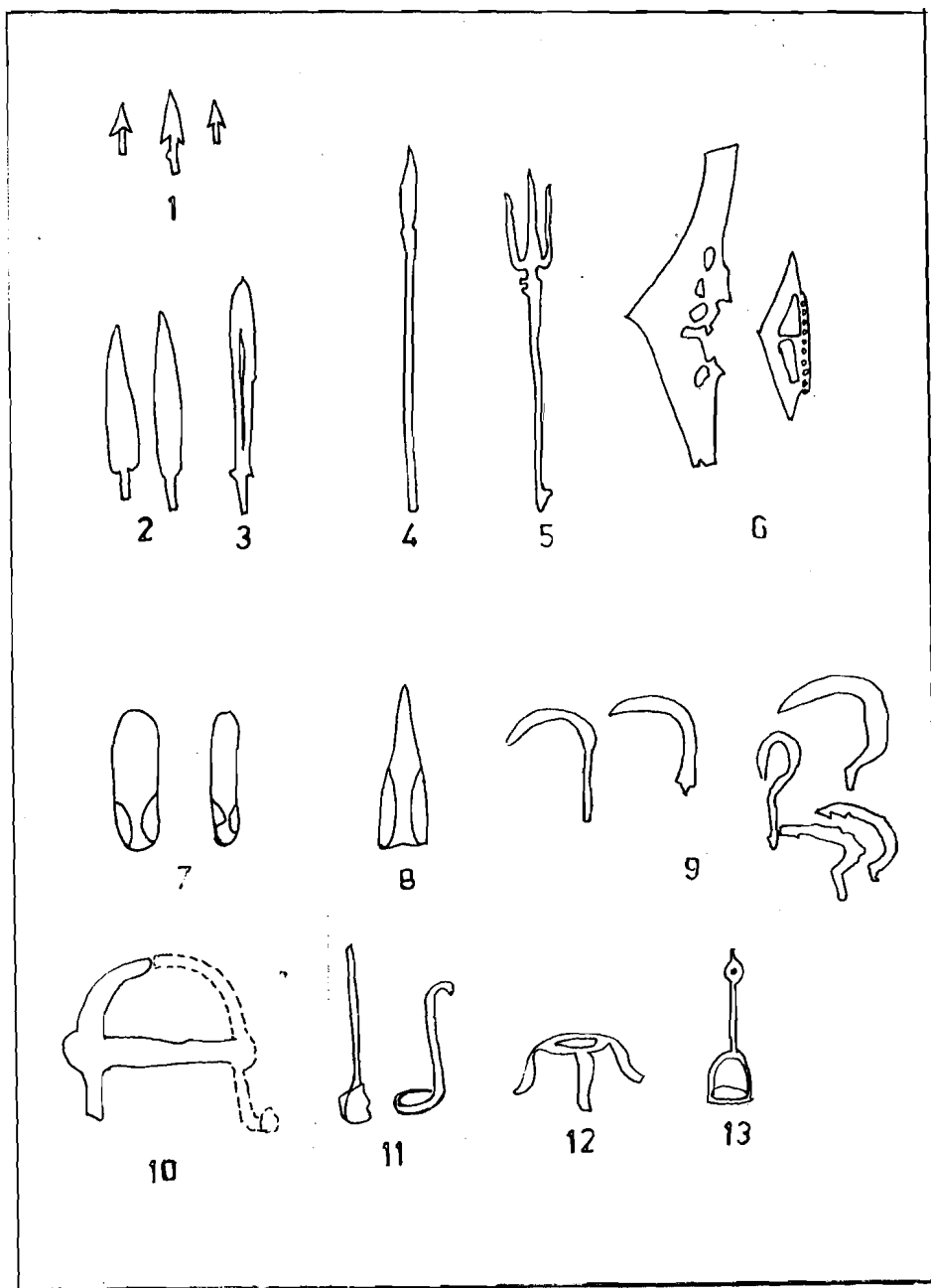


Megalithic Burial Types in South India

Most of the information about the iron age in south India comes from the excavations of the megalithic graves. The megaliths usually refer to burials amidst stones in graveyards away from the habitation area. In south India this kind of elaborate burial came with Iron Age. Megalithic burials have been reported in large numbers from Maharashtra (around Nagpur), Karnataka (sites like Maski), Andhra Pradesh (Nagarjunakonda), Tamil Nadu (Adichanallur) and Kerala.

The megalithic burials showed a variety of methods for the disposal of the dead. In some cases bones of the dead were collected in large urns and buried in a pit. The pit was marked by a stone circle or a capstone or both. The pits and the urns also contained grave goods. In some other cases pottery sarcophagi has been found in

other cases pit circles have been formed with stones for burying the dead. Cist graves made with granite slabs have also been reported. In Kerala rock cut chambers have been made for burial. Yet another kind of megalithic burial is stone alignment comprising rows of standing stones set in diagonal or square plan.



Iron Implements from South Indian, Megalithic Graves. 1. Arrowhead; 2. Daggers; 3. Sword; 4. Spearhead; 5. Trident; 6. Battle axe; 7. Hoes; 8. Plough Share; 9. Sickles; 10. Stirrup; 11. Laddles; 12. Tripod; 13. Lamp.

11.4.2 Origins of the Megalithic Cultures

The megaliths emerged around the end of the second and beginning of the first millennium B.C. and this practice continued for many centuries subsequently. Some scholars are of the opinion that megaliths cannot be associated with a single cultural group and that the south Indian graves appear as a developing complex with several streams of influences combining in them. Firstly, some of the megalithic burials are reminiscent of those of Central Asia, Iran or the Caucasus, and might represent traditions introduced from these areas by Indo-European speaking immigrants.

Secondly, some appear as developments of the indigenous Neolithic-Chalcolithic burial customs of the Deccan.

Scholars have variously identified the megalithic complex with the remains of the Aryans or Dravidians. However, these claims are not acceptable. What seems certain is that these burial complexes emerged in a situation of greater interaction among various communities in south and north India. As pointed out earlier, a large number of agro-pastoral groups existed in these areas prior to the introduction of iron. Many of the burial customs of some of these communities continued in the Iron age. The pottery burial was already practised in Chalcolithic Inamgaon. Other features of the megalithic burials might have developed as local cultural innovations. However, some of the objects found in the graves indicate contacts with the areas to the north-west of India. Particular kinds of pottery like bowl on stand found in these graves are very similar in shape to those of some earlier graves found in north-west India and Iran. Similarly, the finding of bones of horses and implements used for horses indicates that horse riding people had arrived in these areas. Horses could have been brought from Central Asia only because wild horses are not found in India. Horse burial has been reported from Junapani near Nagpur. In place like Maski and Piklihal rock paintings show groups of horse riders carrying metal axes. All this is indicative of greater contact with communities to the north-west of India. So, Iron age burial indicate a combination of indigenous and foreign influences.

11.4.3 Material Culture

As earlier, the material remains of the Iron Age are represented by pottery with certain specificities, besides iron and other metal objects.

i) Pottery

The pottery that we discover from all the excavated graves is the black-and-red ware. The characteristic types are shallow tray bowls and deep bowls, both with a rounded base, conical lids with knobs or loops on the apex, pottery ring stands and larger water pots with rounded bases, etc.

ii) Iron and other metal objects

Iron objects have been found universally in all the megalithic sites right from Junapani near Nagpur in Vidharbha (central India) down to Adichanallur in the south: a distance of nearly 1500 km. They show use of identical tools. There are an array of iron objects: flat iron axes often with crossed iron bands for hafting, different types of flanged spade, hoe, and spud or pick axe, sickles, bill hooks, wedges, cowbars, spears, knives, chisels or adzes, iron tripods, pot rests, saucers, hooklamps, many armed lam-pendants, daggers, swords (some with ornamental bronze hilts), arrowheads and spearheads with hollow sockets, ceremonial scalloped axes, iron tridents etc. In addition to these, there is a special group of objects which consists of horse furniture such as snaffle bits and two simple bar-bits with looped ends (which were recovered from Junapani), a kind of bar-bit with looped nose-and-mouthpiece (known from Sanur), etc. Among other metal objects, the most numerous are bells of copper or bronze, which might have served either as horse or cattle bells. Beads of semi-precious stones and gold objects have also been reported.

11.4.4 Subsistence Economy

Excavated habitation sites of the Iron Age are few. So it is difficult to form a clear picture of the economy of the south Indian megalith builders. Some of the excavated sites have yielded remains of sheep/goat and cattle, and also millets and pulses.

An important feature of the iron objects which are grave goods recovered from the excavated burials is the uniformity in types. Such a wide distribution of identical types of iron objects right from Junapani (near Nagpur) to Adichanallur in the south, testifies to the movement of a fairly tightly knit group of iron workers. According to one scholar the megalithic people of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were proficient in tracing iron ore deposits and in the manufacture of a variety of iron objects. They were trading in these items, and gradually took to settled life. Yet another scholar has put forward the view that these groups were nomadic pastoralists with a greater reliance on sheep/goat herding.

The settlements found near the megalithic complexes have very thin debris of occupation. This would indicate that these people were living in one area for very short time. May be with the knowledge of iron they could colonize new areas. Thus, some of the population was nomadic and some settlements might indicate colonization of new areas. Where the settlements continue from the preceding period, people continued to live in their old ways. Use of iron tools enabled them to use granite stones for their graves. It is these agro-pastoral groups that enter the historical phase in the early centuries of the christian era. They have mentioned in the Sangam literature. Some of the graves have yielded Roman Coins which suggests their entry into history and their participation in trade networks spread over a large area.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write in about 100 words about the Iron Age in South India.

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- 2) Write five lines on the economy of the South Indian Megalith builders.

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11.5 LET US SUM UP

Farming communities emerged in South India around the middle of the third millennium B.C. A large number of pastoral nomadic communities also came into existence in this period. The agriculturists grew various kinds of millet, grain and barley. The pastoral communities tended cattle, sheep and goats. Around the beginning of the second millennium B.C. these communities started using copper and bronze tools. Some of these bronze tools show parallels with the tools found in north-western India. Iron was introduced in this area towards the end of the second millennium B.C. This period also saw the beginning of megalithic burials. This introduced a change in settlement pattern for some of the communities because they started burying their dead away from the habitation areas. However, the farmers continued to grow the same crops and pastoralist continued with their old life style. This phase merged into the early historic south India when the literate tradition began.

11.6 KEY WORDS

Arya: The people who composed the Vedas and who spoke the Indo-European languages.

Burnishing: A form of pottery decoration in which the surface of the pot is polished before firing.

Dravidian: The people who spoke Dravidian languages.

Chalcolithic and Early
Iron Age-I

Dry Farming: A system of tillage in dry countries, surface soil being kept constantly loose, so as to retain scanty rains and reduce evaporation.

Jorwe Ware: A late second millennium red painted pottery first identified in Jorwe, Maharashtra.

Sedentary: Communities living in settled villages.

11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) ×
ii) ✓
iii) ×
iv) ×
- 2) See Sub-sec. 11.2.1
- 3) Since the economy depended on a combination of agriculture and grazing of the cattle, it can be characterised as agro-pastoral. See Sub-sec. 11.2.2.
- 4) Your answer should include the following: these mounds were originally the sites for cattle pens where dung accumulated; they were created because of the burning of cow dung; and that this burning was perhaps a part of the rituals performed by the neolithic communities. Also see Section 11.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-sec. 11.4.1. Write the characteristics which distinguish one phase from the other.
- 2) See Sub-sec. 11.4.3

UNIT 12 THE EARLY VEDIC SOCIETY

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Sources
 - 12.2.1 Literary Sources
 - 12.2.2 Archaeological Sources
- 12.3 The Aryan Invasion—A Myth or A Reality?
- 12.4 Economy
- 12.5 Society
- 12.6 Polity
- 12.7 Religion
- 12.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.9 Key Words
- 12.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- learn about the various sources through which we can attempt to know about the Early Vedic period,
- examine the theory of a large scale migration by the Indo-Aryans through these sources, and
- know about the nature of economy, society, polity and religion of the Early Vedic people.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In Units 10 and 11, you have seen that in different regions of India communities of different stages of cultural development were present during Ca. 2000-1000 B.C. Their cultures were essentially agro-pastoral and our understanding of these cultures is based entirely on archaeological remains because with the exception of Harappa culture, none of these cultures have left behind any written records. In this unit and in the following unit, however, we shall be focusing on the evidence provided by a voluminous body of religious texts which are considered to be the earliest literary records of India. We shall also try to supplement this evidence with, wherever relevant, archaeological evidence. The **Rigveda** is considered to be earliest collection of hymns available, and so, we shall start by examining the **Rigveda** for an understanding of the Early Vedic period and then go on to other Vedas and allied texts which are placed later. This exercise is necessary for two reasons. First, the Vedas are thought to have been composed by the Aryans and it was long believed that the Aryans played a major role in civilizing the Indian subcontinent. The contents of the **Rigveda**, if they are analysed carefully, do not give the impression of a very advanced material culture. On the other hand, many of the material traits, which are characteristic of Indian civilization, are already present in the non-Vedic archaeological cultures in different parts of India. Second, when the contents of the **Rigveda** are compared with the contents of Later Vedas and allied texts, it becomes clear that significant changes took place in the Vedic society itself. This means that there was no fixed cultural pattern which can be called Vedic culture or Aryan culture.

The core geographical area to which the evidence of the **Rigveda** would relate was **Sapta-Sindhava** or the land of seven rivers. This would correspond to the whole of Punjab and its neighbouring region Haryana, but **Rigvedic** geography also included the Gomal plains, southern Afghanistan and southern Jammu and Kashmir.

Indo-Aryan migration from West Asia into the Indian subcontinent. These migrants who are regarded as the authors of the 'Vedas' are called the Vedic people. According to this historical interpretation the Aryans came to India in several stages or waves.

The Aryans are considered to represent a linguistic group speaking Indo-European languages. They are distinguished by traditional historians and archaeologists from the non-Aryan Harappans of the preceding period.

However, in making certain observations on Early Vedic society it may be fruitful to see if literary texts and archaeological evidence can supplement each other. If both types of sources are of the same region and of the same period, then they together can give us more detailed ideas on economic, social, political and religious life.

Let us begin by referring to these sources.

12.2 SOURCES

We have two types of sources to study the Early Vedic Society—Literary and Archaeological Sources.

Let us first examine the literary sources for this period.

12.2.1 Literary Sources

Among the literary sources we may first refer to the four Vedas:

- Rigveda
- Sameveda
- Yajurveda, and
- Atharvaveda

Out of these the Rigveda is the earliest text.

The word 'Veda' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Vid' which means 'to know'.

The "Vedas", are essentially a compilation of prayers and hymns, offered by different families of poets and sages to various gods. These four Vedas are also 'Samhitas', in the sense that they represent the oral tradition of the time. Since the hymns were meant to be recited, learnt and transmitted orally, they were not written when they were first composed. Due to this reason none of the Samhitas can be dated with absolute certainty. Infact, each Samhita represents a collection through a period over a few centuries. Relative dating in terms of the context of these four Samhitas has led scholars to believe that the period represented in the Rigveda can be placed between 1500 B.C. to 1000 B.C.

The Rigvêdic Samhita comprises 10 books or "Mandalas" of which books II to VII are considered to be the earliest and belong specifically to the Early Vedic phase. Books I, VIII, IX and X are considered to be later additions to the Samhita.

Scholars found similarities in the language used in the Rigveda and the Avesta, the oldest Iranian texts, older to the Rigveda. Based on these linguistic similarities and taking into account the chronological precedence of the Avesta over the Rigveda, these scholars suggested that:

- i) The people represented in both these books belonged to a common linguistic group, and they migrated from West Asia and Iran to the Indian subcontinent. These people were called the 'Aryans'.
- ii) The Aryans had a common original home, from where different groups migrated to Europe and the East.

However, the debate regarding the original home of the Aryans is no longer valid, since the concept of a common racial identity for the Aryans has now been proved false. But a common linguistic identity is still believed by historians and on this basis.

some of them still insist upon the theory of the Aryan migration.

12.2.2 Archaeological Sources

Excavations conducted in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Northern Rajasthan, along the Indus and Ghaggar rivers over the last 40 years, have unearthed many post-Harappan chalcolithic settlements from these regions. These have been dated from 1700 B.C. to 600 B.C. You have read about these centuries in Unit 10. You have seen that these chalcolithic cultures are also called late Harappan, OCP (Ochre Coloured Pottery), BRW (Black & Red Ware) and PGW (Painted Grey Ware) cultures.

However, we must remember that pottery types do not reflect the entire culture of the people. Different pottery types do not necessarily mean that people who used these pots also differed. Pottery analysis only helps in defining a specific trait of the cultural assemblage, nothing more. Some scholars have made attempts to examine whether the evidence provided by some of these cultures of north-western and northern India can be compared with what we know from a study of the Vedic texts.

12.3 THE ARYAN INVASION—A MYTH OR A REALITY?

Was the Aryan invasion a myth or a reality? Let us see to what extent archaeological evidence help us in answering this question.

Archaeologists have attempted to relate the various post-Harappan cultures with the Aryans. The Painted Grey Ware Pottery which has been dated between 900 B.C. to approximately 500 B.C., has been repeatedly connected with Aryan craftsmanship. Their argument is based on inferences which historians make from their analysis of the literary texts. Hence, archaeologists, following linguistic similarities found between the Rigveda and the Avesta, tried to find similarities in pottery forms, paintings on ceramics and forms of copper objects etc. between post-Harappan and the West Asian/Iranian Chalcolithic assemblages. Such similarities were magnified to support the view that the Aryans were a group of people who migrated from West Asia to the Indian subcontinent. Thus literary and archaeological sources were made to support one another in order to validate the notion of migration.

Linguistic similarities between the Rigveda and the Avesta are not disputed. But such similarities do not really suggest large-scale migration of people into the Indian subcontinent. Secondly, the similarities which have been found between chalcolithic artefacts of India and those of Western Asia are only occasional. They also do not suggest large-scale migration of people. The concept of an "Aryan", as stated before, cannot be equated with any particular type of pottery. It also does not have any ethnic or racial significance. The 'Aryan' is, therefore, at best a vague concept, related to linguistic similarities between people.

In this context you should take into account the following points suggested by archaeological excavations at various sites:

- i) Earlier scholars believed that the Indo-Aryans caused the downfall of the Harappan civilization by destroying the Harappan towns and cities. They quoted Rigvedic hymns which invoke Indra to destroy the dwellers of the forts. But archaeological evidence has shown that the decline of the Harappan civilization was not caused by any large-scale destruction brought about by an alien invading group. (See Unit 9, Block 2).
- ii) Attempts to identify the makers of Painted Grey Ware with the Aryans also do not receive strong support from archaeological evidence. If the PGW cultures related to the Aryans, then keeping the theory of invasion in mind, we should have found this pottery type in the areas of Bahawalpur and Punjab i.e. along the route taken by the so-called Aryan migrants. However, we find these pottery types confined to a particular geographical region comprising Haryana, Upper Ganga basin and eastern Rajasthan.
- iii) It was earlier thought that there exists a time gap and hence, a cultural

What disappeared after 1750 B.C. were the town and cities of the Harappan civilization and such artefacts as the seals, weights, measures etc.—i.e. articles connected with trade and urbanism. The rural structure of the earlier period continued into the second and the first millennium B.C. The variation found in the archaeological remains of the post-Harappan period—in pottery, metal implements and other objects—may also represent “regional” variations in Indian chalcolithic cultures.

Check Your Progress 1

- [illegible]

- [illegible]

- 3) Write 'Yes' or 'No' against each sentence.
- Our knowledge of Early Vedic period is based on only literary sources.
 - The Vedas are essentially compilations of prayers and hymns offered to various gods.
 - The Avesta was the oldest Iranian text.
 - The linguistic similarities between the Rigveda and the Avesta are enough grounds to validate the notion of 'Aryan' migration into the Indian subcontinent.

12.4 ECONOMY

The Early Vedic society was pastoral, cattle rearing being the dominant occupational activity. A pastoral society relies more on its animal wealth than agricultural produce. Pastoralism is a subsistence strategy adopted by people who live in areas where large scale agriculture is not feasible due to some environmental and to a certain extent, cultural constraints.

Hymns of the Rigveda yield extensive evidence of the importance of cattle in the Early Vedic society. Many linguistic expressions in the Rigveda are associated with the cow (**gau**). Cattle was the chief measure of wealth and a wealthy man who owned many cattle was called 'gomat'. The terms used for conflicts and battles in this period were gavishti, gavesana, gavyat, etc. The former literally means 'to search for cows'. The terms themselves suggest that possession of cattle was the bone of contention between groups and led to occasional inter-tribal fights and conflicts. The Panis, who were the enemies of the Vedic people, are stated in the Rigveda to have hidden their wealth, mostly cows, in the mountains and forests. The Vedic god Indra was invoked to release these cattle. This reference suggests that cattle raids were common. The raja or the chief is called the 'gopati' or one who protects cows. In the Rigveda, Godhuli is used as a term for a measure of time. Distance is called gavyuti. A daughter is called duhitri or one who milks the cows. Kinship units are labelled as gotra.

All these terms are derived from **gau** and suggest that social relations and all important areas of Rigvedic life centred round the rearing of cows. Literary references to pasture lands, cow pen, dairy products and domesticated animals are also found in most of the hymns and prayers.

Compared to the very substantial linguistic evidence for cattle rearing in the Rigveda, agricultural activities find very few references. Most of the references to agriculture are of a later date. Apart from 'Yava' or barley, no other grains are mentioned. The Early Vedic people did not use iron technology. Copper, with which they were familiar, did not have as much value in agricultural operations as iron implements. Stone tools (like axes) were used and these are mentioned in the Rigveda. Fire was used to burn down the forest cover and shifting agriculture was practised. Further, the region under discussion receives low rainfall and all the rivers mentioned in the Rigveda i.e. the Satluj, Indus, Ghaggar, Ravi etc. are known to change their courses frequently. Without the facilities of large-scale irrigation which were not developed in this period, the alluvial lands near the rivers could not be cultivated on a permanent basis. Thus the hoes, sickles and axes mentioned in the texts, were probably used for slashing purposes or shifting cultivation. The evidence of pastoralism as well as shifting cultivation suggests that the people were either nomadic or semi-nomadic. They moved out of their villages with their herds for a certain period in order to feed their cattle. The literary and the archaeological sources do show that the people did not lead a fully sedentary life. The mobile character of the population is seen in the term 'vis' which also implied a settlement. The suffixes Punar (vis), Upa (vis) and Pra (vis) were constantly used, and the settlements were qualified by them to mean settling near (a settlement), re-entering (a settlement) or coming back (to the settlement).

Gift exchange and redistribution had an important economic role in the society. Tribal conflicts led to the payment of tributes and prestations, i.e. bali, to the victorious chiefs by the defeated or the subordinate groups. The rest of the clansmen of the victorious tribe had a share in the spoils and booty won in the war. The chief

also fed and gave gifts to his clansmen during ceremonial occasions. This was done by him to acquire prestige. Evidence of trade and commerce in Early Vedic society is meagre. There was no concept of private property based on land-ownership.

12.5 SOCIETY

The Early Vedic Society was a tribal society, in which social relations based on kinship ties were predominant. The society was not divided according to caste lines, and even the rajas (kings), the purohitas (priests), the artisans etc. were parts of the clan networks. The tribe was referred to as the jana and many references to the different tribes are found in the Rigveda. Inter-tribal conflicts were frequent, an example being the battle of the Ten Kings mentioned in the Rigveda. Some of the tribes, which fought in this battle were the Bharatas, the Purus, the Yadus, the Druhyus, the Anus and the Turvasus. Tribal conflicts, as mentioned earlier, were related to cattle raids, cattle thefts etc. The chief of the tribe was the raja or the gopati. He was the leader in battle and the protector of the tribe. His office, was not based on heredity, but he was selected from amongst the clansmen. The warrior category was the "rajanya". Many clans (vis) formed a tribe. The clans settled in villages or grama. The basic social unit was the Kula, or the family, and the Kulapa i.e. 'one who protects the family' denoted the eldest male member or the head of the family.

Tribe (Jana), Tribal Unit (Vis), Village (Gramma), Family (Kula), Head of the family (Kulapa).
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Society was patriarchal. The birth of a son was the common desire of the people. The importance given to the male members is reflected in the hymns, where the desire for a son is a constant prayer.

Even though society was patriarchal, women had also important position in it. They were educated and they had access to the assemblies. There are also instances of women who composed hymns. They had a right to choose their partners, and could marry late. However women were always thought to be dependent on their fathers, brothers or husbands. Education was imparted orally, but the tradition of education was not very well developed in this period.

The authors of the Rigveda distinguished themselves from other groups whom they called Dasas and Dasyus. The Dasas are described as dark, full-lipped, snub-mosed, worshippers of the phallus and of hostile speech. They were rich in cattle and lived in fortified strongholds. We learn about another people called the Panis who were wealthy in cattle treasures. The term Pani came to be associated with merchants and wealth in the subsequent ages. These groups fought and befriended each other from time to time and one cannot define them as separate racial or the linguistic groups. For example the most famous chief mentioned in the Rigveda is Sudasa who led the Bharata tribe in the battle of the ten kings. The Dasa ending in his name might suggest some links with the Dasas. However, the presence of different groups in the same area might have contributed to the emergence of the Varna system.

Various occupational groups such as those of weavers, smiths, carpenters, leather workers, chariotmakers, priests etc. are also mentioned. The chariotmakers occupied a special social status. There are no references to beggars, wage-earners or wages in the Rigveda. However, society was economically stratified, and we do find references to rich people possessing chariots, cattle, etc. and making generous gifts of them.

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Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What do you understand by 'pastoral society'? Why was it the dominant occupational activity of the Early Vedic people?

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- 2) What was the importance of cattle in the Early Vedic Society? Answer in 50 words.

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- 3) Discuss five important characteristics of the Early Vedic Society? Write in 5 sentences.

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- 4) Fill in the blanks with appropriate word.

- i) In the early vedic society the Raja or the chief was called the (Gomat/Gopati).
- ii) The chief cause of occasional inter-tribal fights and conflicts of this period was the possession of (Cattle/Land).
- iii) Except (Yava/Rice) no other grains are mentioned in the Rigveda.
- iv) The basic social unit was the (Kula/Clan).
- v) The Early Vedic society was based on (Polygamy/Monogamy).

12.6 POLITY

The tribal polity was not completely egalitarian. A division is found in the Rigveda itself, which is seen in references of two groups—the Rajanyas, or those who fought the wars, and are credited to be the senior lineage, and the rest of the clansmen or the vis, who formed the junior lineage. Though none of the groups occupied a distinct social hierarchy, constant conflicts and inter-tribal wars helped to create a division in the society. The growing needs for more pasture lands, cattle for the protection of people and their settlement all probably contributed to an increase in inter and intra-tribal conflicts and warfare. The clans held large yajnas or sacrifices to help the warrior groups in the wars. In these yajnas the officiating priest or the purohita acted as the mediator between his clansmen and the gods. He also invoked the gods' blessings for the tribal chief, for his success in the wars. Initially, the whole

clan participated in these yajnas on an equal footing. Large scale distribution of wealth, food, etc. was made during these sacrifices and members got an equal share. But with the growing incidence of conflicts and fights, yajnas or sacrifices also became important and the purohita assumed a special status in the society. In the later part of our period, they received a major share of the gifts from the rajas, and assumed a superior position vis-a-vis the other clan members.

The office of the raja also assumed importance on account of wars, etc. and the division between the senior and the junior lineages became sharper. At what point of time these political distinctions became apparent is difficult to state, but we must remember that the 10th book of the Rigveda contains the "Purusha-Sukta" hymn, and in the Later Vedic texts we find evidence of the superior rajanya groups, assuming the status of the Kshatriya—a separate varna by itself. These developments took place after 1000 B.C. This does not mean that the society was stagnant during our period of study. In fact it was changing slowly but surely leading to the development, in the Later Vedic phase, of a complex socio-political structure (see Unit 13).

Tribal assemblies e.g. the Gana, Vidatha, Sabha and Samiti are mentioned in the Rigveda. The Sabha may have been the council of select clan members and the Samiti perhaps comprised the whole clan. These assemblies performed the functions of the government and administration and were also involved in the selection of the raja from amongst the clansmen. They thus kept the power of the warriors in check. However, as stated before, though we do not find well defined political hierarchy in the Early Vedic set up, the changes during the period gave rise to a socio-political hierarchy which manifested itself in the origin of the Varna system during the "Later Vedic phase". Early Vedic Society was governed by tribal values and norms and was largely egalitarian.

12.7 RELIGION

The religious ideas of the Vedic people are reflected in the hymns of the Rigveda. They venerated the natural forces around them (like wind, water, rain, thunder, fire etc.) which they could not control, and invested nature with divinity conceived in human forms, which were mostly masculine. Very few female deities were venerated. The religion thus reflected the patriarchal society and was that of primitive animism.

Indra was the god of strength, who was invoked to destroy the enemies. He was the god of thunder and was the rainmaker who was asked periodically to release the water. He could not be vanquished. Thus thunder and rain (natural phenomena) were related with strength, which was personified in a masculine form, represented in the god Indra. The concept of a tribal chief, who was a war-lord is also found represented in the character of Indra.

Agni, next in importance to Indra, was the god of fire. He was considered to be an intermediary between heaven and earth i.e., between gods and men. He dominated the domestic hearth and marriages were solemnized in his presence. Fire destroyed dirt and germs, and hence Agni was considered to be pure. The importance of Agni can be related to that of the yajna or sacrifice in the Early Vedic society. It was supposed that the oblations offered to Agni were carried to the gods in the form of smoke. Varuna personified water, and he was the upholder of the natural order of the universe.

Yama was the god of death and had an important place in the Early Vedic religious belief.

There were many other gods e.g. Surya, Soma (also a drink), Savitri, Rudra etc., and hosts of celestial beings like Gandharvas, Apsaras, Maruts to whom prayers and hymns were addressed in the Rigveda.

The Vedic religion was sacrificial. Sacrifices or yajnas were performed:

- to invoke the gods
- in order to grant boons—either victory in battles

- or for acquisition of cattle, sons etc.

We find some hymns dedicated to the power residing in the sacrificial implements, especially to the sacrificial altar, to the stones used for pressing the Soma plant, to the weapons of war, drums, mortars etc. Hymns and prayers were recited in these sacrifices and generally priests performed these yajnas. The growing importance of sacrifices in the Vedic society resulted in the growing importance of priests as well. The ritual of sacrifice also led to the growth and development in the knowledge of mathematics and animal anatomy. Elementary mathematics was necessary to make the calculations which were required to establish the positions of various objects in the sacrificial area. Also, the frequent sacrifices of animals led to a knowledge of their anatomy. For the Vedic people, the world grew out of a vast cosmic sacrifice and was not maintained by the proper performance of sacrifice. Religion was not based on magico-ritual formulae, rather it stressed direct communication with the gods through sacrifices, hymns etc. Gods were not worshipped for the spiritual upliftment of the people, nor for any other abstract philosophical concept, but were invoked to grant material gains.

Sacrificial religion is a religion of the pastoral people. Animal sacrifice is rampant in the pastoral society, where the older animals who can no longer produce milk or meat, or used for breeding purposes, i.e. those who are no longer economically viable, are killed in order to lessen the burden on their owner. Hence animal sacrifice was one way of destroying the old animals and thus had an important role in the society. In the agrarian society however older animals are employed in the fields, used for traction purposes and hence the destruction of animals is frowned upon by a society which primarily depends on agricultural activities. Thus the Vedic religion reflected the patriarchal pastoral society and was materialistic in perspective.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What was the position of the Rajan in the Early Vedic polity? Answer in five sentences.

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- 2) Discuss the nature of religion of the Early Vedic people. Write in five sentences.

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- 3) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or (×)
 - i) The 'Purohita' or priest had no special place in the society.
 - ii) The 'Sabha' and 'Samiti' had no power in the selection of the Raja.
 - iii) Indra, the god of strength, was the most important god of the Early Vedic people.
 - iv) Gods were worshipped for the spiritual upliftment of the people.
 - v) Religion was not based on magico-ritual formulae.

12.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt about literary and to some extent archaeological sources which help us in reconstruction of the Early Vedic society. In the light of the

archaeological sources it is difficult to accept the notion of a large-scale Aryan migration.

The Early Vedic economy was mainly pastoral and cow was the most important form of wealth. Agriculture had secondary importance in the life of the Early Vedic people.

The Early Vedic society was tribal and basically egalitarian. Clan and kinship relations formed the basis of the society and family was the basic social unit. Social divisions based on occupations had started but there was no caste division.

In the Early Vedic polity the tribal chief or the Rajan and the priest or the Purohita had important positions. Among several tribal assemblies the Sabha and the Samiti played very important roles. Though there was no well-defined political hierarchy in the Early Vedic set up, the tribal polity was not completely egalitarian.

The Early Vedic people personified the natural forces, e.g. wind, water, rain, etc. and worshipped them as god. They worshipped god not through any abstract philosophical concept but for material gains. There was growing importance of sacrifices or yajnas in the Vedic religion.

What you must remember is that this society was not static but dynamic. Between about 1500 B.C. and 1000 B.C. society was constantly evolving and newer elements in the economic, social, political and religious sphere were operating to transform its structure.

12.9 KEY WORDS

Artefacts: Something made by human being, e.g. a simple tool or weapon archaeological interest.

Bali: Tributes and prestations paid to the victorious chiefs by the defeated groups.

Clan: Large family group, found in tribal communities.

Kinship: Relationship by blood.

Nomad: Member of a tribe that wanders from place to place and who has no fixed home.

Patriarchy: Male dominated family or tribe.

Animism: The attribution of a soul to natural objects and phenomenon.

Semi-Sedentism: Settlers who do not settle in a place permanently and move to a new settlement.

Shifting agriculture: After the use of a land for cultivation for a short period, it is left and fresh land is used.

Stratigraphy: Layers detected in the excavation. The basis for detecting these layers could lie in the different soil types or different artefacts found in the excavated profile.

12.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Rig, Sama, Yajur, Atharva. Rigveda
- 2) The archaeological sources do not support the theory of Aryan invasion or migration. Your answer should include the arguments of the archaeologists against the notion of large destruction of the Harappan civilization by the Aryans, culture discontinuity between the late Harappan and the post-Harappan chalcolithic period etc. See Section 12.3.

- 3) i) No
- ii) Yes
- iii) Yes
- iv) No

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) A society which is basically dependent on cattle wealth. Because large-scale agriculture was not possible due to some environmental and cultural constraints. See Sec. 12.4.
- 2) Cattle was the basic source of wealth in the Early Vedic society. You have to write about the importance of cattle in different spheres of life. See Sec. 12.4
- 3) Your answer should include that it was a tribal society, society was patriarchal, family was the basic social unit, caste division was not there etc. See Sec. 12.5
- 4) i) Gopati
- ii) Cattle
- iii) Yava
- iv) Kulu
- v) Monogamy

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Your answer should include that Raja was the chief of the tribe, frequent wars made him important, he was the protector of the tribe, his position was not always hereditary, etc. See Sec. 12.6
- 2) The Vedic people worshipped various forces of nature as god, stress was on sacrifice but not on magico-ritual formulae, religion was based on material gains etc. See Sec. 12.7
- 3) i) ×
- ii) ×
- iii) ✓
- iv) ×
- v) ✓

UNIT 13 CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PHASE

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Sources
 - 13.2.1 Literary Sources
 - 13.2.2 Archaeological Sources
- 13.3 Iron Technology and its Impact
- 13.4 The Nature of the Economy
 - 13.4.1 Importance of Pastoralism Declines
 - 13.4.2 Changes in the Functions of the Rituals
 - 13.4.3 Emerging Importance of Land
- 13.5 Polity and Society
 - 13.5.1 Polity
 - 13.5.2 Society
- 13.6 Religion
 - 13.6.1 Priestcraft
 - 13.6.2 The Changing Gods
 - 13.6.3 Folk Tradition
- 13.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.8 Key Words
- 13.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

13.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to know about:

- the sources which enable us to study the later Vedic Society,
- the changes in the social, political, economic and religious structure during the later Vedic period, and
- the economic and social implications of a change in technology with the introduction of a new metal, i.e. iron.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The period which you are going to study now extends roughly from 1000 B.C. to 600 B.C. By this period some of Vedic tribes had moved from the 'Sapta Sindhava' region to the upper Ganga Valley and other adjacent regions.

During the period of this shift a number of changes in their social, political, economic and religious structure took place. In this unit we shall be discussing the major aspects of these changes.

13.2 SOURCES

We get both literary as well as archaeological sources to study this period.

13.2.1 Literary Sources

The later additions specially the 10th Mandala to the Rigveda Samhita and the Sama, the Yajur and the Atharva Veda samhitas are the other vedic texts which are assigned to the later vedic phase. The Sama Veda samhita is a book of prayers and chants which are from the Rigveda, modified and set to tune for the explicit purpose of singing them during rituals.

- The Yajurveda elaborates the rituals which accompany the recitation of hymns. The rituals and the hymns in this samhita document the social and political milieu of this period.
- The Artharvaveda contains the folk tradition of this period and represents popular religion. It is a good source for understanding the socio-religious conditions of the common people.

These Samhitas are followed by a series of texts called the Brahmanas, which are commentaries on the Vedas. They explain the social and religious aspects of the rituals and throw light on the Vedic society. Although it would be wrong to take any period of early Indian history as the 'epic' period as such the two Sanskrit epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana are rich in information on different aspects of early Indian society. Historians believe that the core of what is reflected in these epics can be traced to the later vedic phase. The geographical focus of the phase was on the territories of the upper Ganga basin and the middle Ganga basin, although other regions are also mentioned. In the epics also the major events took place in this region. We must however remember that there is nothing to prove that the stories narrated in the epics were actual historical events. Secondly both the epics took centuries to reach their present shape. So there are many types of societies which we may find reflected in the epics.

13.2.2 Archaeological Sources

The literary sources repeatedly refer to the areas of Western U.P., Haryana and Rajasthan. The period assigned to the later vedic phase is circa 1000 B.C. to 600 B.C. Many communities and cultural groups are mentioned in the texts. Thus, particular pottery forms cannot be identified with some tribe or group. However, in the same geographical region some agricultural communities flourished in roughly the same time bracket. These communities used a particular kind of pottery called the Painted Grey Ware (PGW). Thus, these archaeological finds would reflect the material conditions of the later vedic society.

More than 700 PGW sites have been found along the Upper Ganga Basin. Their distribution extends from the dry beds of the river Ghaggar in Bahawalpur and northern Rajasthan, to the watershed of the Indus and Ganges and the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. The eastern limits of this ware is restricted to the northern plains of the Ganges, as the site of Sravasti indicates. Some important PGW sites are Atranjikhhera, Ahichhatra, Noh, Hastinapur, Kurukshetra, Bhagwanpura and Jakhera.

The Banas culture of southern Rajasthan, which has been dated from 2000-1400 B.C. may have possibly extended to the Ganges Valley at around 800 B.C. Thus, these Black and Red Ware users can also be related to the present period. Archaeology does not document the eastward shift of the "Vedic Aryans", a shift which is suggested in the literary texts. Archaeology does not document any single culture shifting eastwards. Thus there remains a large gap between the nature of the literary and the archaeological sources. There is however the general point that the later vedic society as well the society reflected in archaeology was a society which had used iron.

Iron objects are common to most of the PGW sites. The Carbon 14 dates from Atranjikhhera, Jodhpura and Noh suggest that in the context of the Gangetic plains this metal was introduced around 1000-800 B.C.

The exploitation of the iron ore in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal and Punjab, and later in South Bihar, was an indigenous phenomenon. The Rigveda mentions "ayas" which may refer to Iron, though the archaeological evidence relates iron to the Later Vedic period. Literary sources provide ample corroboration of this. The Yajurveda qualifies "ayas" as Syama ayas, and the Brahmanas speak of Krishna ayas. Both the words refer to a black metal which means Iron.

Recent excavations suggest that the megalithic people of south India too were familiar with iron technology. Hence we can no longer talk in terms of the introduction of iron technology into the Indian subcontinent by the migrant Aryans.

13.3 IRON TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT

An important question to be asked here is: does the knowledge of iron lead to any advancement in the metal technology of the period? Similarly one would also like to know the extent to which the introduction of a new technology changes the material milieu of the society.

The evidence of the Later Vedic period suggests a transition from a pastoral society to a sedentary agrarian society. It was earlier suggested that the socketed axes made of iron were extensively used to clear the forests and the Gangetic Doab for permanent cultivation. It was also believed that iron tipped ploughshares and hoes increased the efficiency of the agricultural implements which furthered agricultural activities. Thus scholars believed that the knowledge of Iron technology was an important factor for the development of agrarian economy. However, we now know that the Later Vedic period was neither purely agrarian, nor was it well advanced in iron technology. The rich iron ore mines of Bihar were still not exploited and the technology of smelting iron was primitive.

The objects which are found in the excavations are iron tipped arrowheads, spearheads, etc. i.e. weapons of which the largest number comes from the Ahichhatra excavations. Sickles, hoes, axes are rarely found in the excavations. One ploughshare has been reported from Jakhera which probably belongs to the end of this period. Thus, from the excavations, it appears that the use of iron was restricted to making weapons. Iron did not influence the agricultural technology until the second half of the first millennium B.C. when the marshlands and monsoon forests in the middle Gangetic valley were gradually cleared.

In the Later Vedic period, clearing of forests by burning was carried out in the upper Doab. We have the description of the burning of the Khandavavana in the Mahabharata to establish the city of Indraprastha. Iron tipped weapons and horse chariots helped military activities which were rampant in this period and have been extensively documented in the Mahabharata. However, in subsistence related activities, iron technology had practically no role.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Tick (✓) the right sentence.
 - i) We can definitely say that the Vedic society shifted eastwards.
 - ii) It is impossible to say that the Vedic society shifted eastwards.
 - iii) We can guess that the Vedic society shifted eastwards.
 - iv) None of the above.
- 2) Through Atharvaveda: (✓) the right sentence.
 - i) We can understand the folk traditions of the Later Vedic period.
 - ii) We can understand only the elite tradition of the Later Vedic society.
 - iii) We can understand the socio-religious conditions of the common people.
 - iv) Both (i) and (iii).
- 3) In the later vedic period: Tick (✓) the right sentence.
 - i) Iron technology was mostly used for agriculture.
 - ii) Iron technology was mostly used for weapons of war.
 - iii) Iron technology was not there at all.
 - iv) Steel was being used.
- 4) Write in fifty words the impact iron technology had on Later Vedic society.

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13.4 THE NATURE OF THE ECONOMY

The growth of agriculture in the Later Vedic period was made possible by the availability of vast tracts of fertile alluvial lands of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and the middle Ganga valley—an area which was slowly settled throughout the first millennium B.C. However, the later vedic texts reflect the continued importance of pastoralism.

Both archaeological and literary sources document the introduction of rice as the staple diet of the people. The PGW and Banas culture yield charred grains of rice from the excavated sites. The Vedic texts mention **Vrihi**, **Tandula** and **Sali**, all denoting rice. It appears that cropping was practised now, and the fields grew both barley and rice. The elaborate sacrifices of this period, e.g. the rajasuya, include offerings of grain along with milk, ghee and animals. The twelve sacrifices prescribed in the Atharvaveda for acquiring material benefits recommend the gifts of cows, calves, oxen, gold, cooked rice, thatched houses and well cultivated fields to the brahmanas. The items of the offerings are a clear indication of the growing importance of sedentary settlements and agriculture. Later Vedic texts also refer to eight, twelve and even twenty four oxen yoked to the plough. Though the number of oxen mentioned is possible symbolic, the reference suggests that plough cultivation was familiar in this period.

13.4.1 Importance of Pastoralism Declines

Pastoralism was no longer the main subsistence activity of the people as it was in the Early Vedic period. Mixed farming which included cultivation and herding was the occupational norm of this period. Agricultural activities in this phase were not labour intensive. The sites from where rice remains are found in the excavations are located on the elevated areas of the Doab. This suggests that wet rice cultivation which is labour intensive was not practised as yet.

Mixed farming led to the rise of sedentary settlements. The PGW deposits are generally 2 to 3 m. deep and indicate that people were living in the same spot for a long time. At Bhagwanpura and Jakhera, the excavations show that the earlier phase of circular huts made of wattle and daub or wood were replaced in this period by more substantial houses with earth walls. Thus durable materials were being used for house construction owing to the adoption of a sedentary life style.

13.4.2 Changes in the Functions of the Rituals

In the Early Vedic society rituals were performed to bring about the welfare of the entire tribe. Gods were worshipped for ensuring victory over other tribes, granting cattle and sons. It was also an occasion for the chiefs to distribute wealth. In the Later Vedic society the function of the rituals underwent a subtle change. Rituals became much more complicated which could continue for years. Thus only the rich could perform them. The spirit of collectivity was reduced. Sacrifices were performed to ensure control over rest of the tribe. Gifts were no longer given to the entire tribe. Rather the chief gave gifts to the Brahmanas who performed sacrifices for him. The rituals were so complicated that it needed expert Brahmanas to perform it since a wrong incantation could bring disaster to the performer. The performer of sacrifices was supposed to grant super-human status to the chiefs meaning that they were superior to rest of the tribe. For this service the chief passed on a large part of his wealth to the Brahman priest. Thus, the rituals became a mechanism for ensuring the material and spiritual superiority of the chiefs and the Brahmanas.

13.4.3 Emerging Importance of Land

Land was cultivated through family labour and the help of domestic servants and slaves. In this period, initially land was owned by the clan or the vis. When clan ownership gradually changed to family ownership the grihapati or householder became a man of wealth. The vaisyas (those who originally belonged to the vis) were the producing class in the society and they became the source of wealth and subsistence for the Kshatriyas and the Brahmanas who did not actively participate in

food production. The vaisyas had to give prestations to the Kshatriyas in lieu of the latter protecting their lands, and dana and dakshina to the priests for their moral upliftment. The vis/vaisya, characterizing the householding economy, became the mainstay of economy. Prestations and dana to the non-producing classes helped in the distribution of subsistence goods. There are no references to the sale of land. Visvakarma Bhauvana, a ruler, was rebuked by Prithvi (the earth) when he tried to make a grant of land. This textual reference suggests communal ownership of land over which the vis had major participatory rights.

13.5 POLITY AND SOCIETY

The transition from a predominantly pastoral to a mixed farming economy had a great impact on the character of the Later Vedic society and polity. The main trends of changes were:

- Tribal identity of the Early Vedic society gradually gave way to territorial identity and consequently the nature of chiefship changed.
- The social structure which was based on relations within a clan and was largely egalitarian in the Early Vedic period became much more complex. This type of society is marked by inequality. Even the same clan was divided into groups, some of which could have high status in society and some low status.

13.5.1 Polity

Jana was used in the sense of people or tribe in the Rigvedic period, but now the concept of janapada emerged. Janapada meant the area where the tribe settled. The word rashtra was also used for the first time in the Later Vedic texts. However, it was still not used in the sense of a state with well defined territories.

The Kurus, who were formed from the union between two major Vedic tribes—the Bharatas and the Purus, are mentioned in texts as occupying the area in the upper portion of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Similarly, the Panchalas are mentioned as people who occupied the middle portion of the Doab, called the Panchala desa. This indicates that tribal identities were merging with territorial identities. It is also stated that when the Kurus and the Panchalas came together, their authority over the upper and middle reaches of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab was complete. These changes in the relationship between the Jana and the area over which it wielded control helped towards the formation of the mahajanapadas and janapadas by the 6th century B.C. (see Block 4).

Tribal Chiefs and Warriors: When tribal groups came to be associated and identified with particular territories, it also brought about a change in the status and functions of the tribal chiefs. The rajan or the chief was no longer involved only in cattle raids but emerged as the protector of the territory where his tribesmen settled. The rajanya which already was a superior lineage during the Rigvedic period, now became the 'Kshatriya' i.e. those who held power over dominions, which is the literal meaning of the word 'Kshatriya'. The Kshatriya class based their power on their role as the protector of their tribes and the land over which their tribes settled. The "vis" had to pay prestations to the Kshatriya, in lieu of the latter's protection and thus the status of the vis was progressively subordinated to the Kshatriya lineage. Bali and Bhaga no longer meant prestations given at will, but gradually assumed the forms of regular tributes and taxes.

Tribal Assemblies: The change in the status of the Kshatriya or the warrior class is also reflected in the changing nature of the tribal assemblies. The sabha became more important than the samiti during this period.

Reference to rajas in the assembly or the sabha suggests that they helped the king in his duties. The office of the raja or the chief was not based solely on birth but the choice of rajas was restricted to the Kshatriyas.

Raja's Legitimacy: In the absence of firmly established principles of heredity and primogeniture, consecratory rituals became very important for the ruler in order to

assert this authority. Hence, ceremonial sacrifices like rajasuya, asvamedha and vajapeya were performed on lavish scale. In the Rigvedic period, the asvamedha yajna was a small affair. But in this period, this was performed to subjugate other areas and legitimize the ruler's hold over alien lands. The other yajnas included prayers for the rulers' health and all three were in essence legitimizing methods, employed by the raja to proclaim his superiority and power. For instance the sacrificer was proclaimed as a raja in the course of the rajasuya. These sacrifices were found to be of relevance in later periods also when new kingdoms and new monarchs emerged. They used sacrifices to give religions legitimacy to their power.

The raja was also required to integrate his territory with resources, economic production and distribution which enhanced his status considerably from a mere raider, or a leader of battles. However, he was not yet the sovereign. The fact that he was elected and could be removed put severe constraints on him, since he was answerable to the clan. Also, he did not appoint the other rajas who helped him with his duties. They were chiefs in their own right. What is important is that the Kshatriya lineage gained a distinctly superior status during this period, the reason being that the concept of territorial identity was established now. Thus territory became the physical manifestation of the ruler's power to rule.

Tribal Conflicts: The nature of the intra-tribal conflicts and conflicts within tribes also changed. Fights were no longer mere skirmishes over cattle, now the acquisition of land was an important element in these disputes. The necessity of increasing territory can be connected with the growth of population within the tribes. Iron weapons and light wheeled chariots driven by horses raised the efficiency of the fighters. The Mahabharata depicts an intra-clan warfare between the Kauravas and the Pandavas of the Kuru clan.

The Priest: With the rising importance of the rajanya Kshatriya, the Brahmanas too became important since they legitimized the office of the ruler through the consecratory rituals. The redistribution of wealth through dana and dakshina on such occasions was primarily from the Kshatriya yajamana to the brahmana priests. The elaborate consecratory rituals suggest that initially the power of the raja was not so secure and hence he had to provide proof of his ability to rule. The status of the officiating priests became at par with the gods, in the later period. It was felt that the gods had to be propitiated with yajnas and the officiating brahmana had to be satiated with dana. Thus the channel of redistribution was between these two higher status groups, and political supremacy was slowly becoming the domain of the Kshatriya.

13.5.2 Society

We have already read about the declining status of the vis and the ascendancy of the Kshatriyas and the Brahmanas. Society was thus composed of unequal groups.

This hymn describes the origin of the four varnas, i.e. Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and the Sudra, from the body of the universal creator, Prajapati. The 'Hymn of the Priemeval Man' comes from the later portion of the Rigveda. Thus hymn for the first time describes the origin of the four varnas. It says.....

"When they divided the Man, into how many parts did they divide him? What was his mouth, what were his arms, what were his thighs and his feet called?

"The Brahman was his mouth, of his arms made the Kshatriya, his thighs became the Vaisya, of his feet the Sudra was born".

The symbolism which is projected in these hymns is that Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra are limbs of the society. However, these limbs did not have equal status. The Brahman was compared to the head whereas the Shudra was compared to the feet. In social life Brahmins were considered the highest Varna because society could communicate with gods with the help of Brahmins only. The Sudras on the other hand performed menial tasks and included slaves captured in wars.

Concept of Varna: The system of varna had the following features:

a) status by birth

- b) a hierarchical ordering of the varnas (Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra) with Brahmana at the top and Sudra at the base).
- c) rules of endogamy and ritual purity.

The Varna system is further tied with the concept of Dharma i.e. universal law, and the varna dharma was an attempt to establish a social law for a systematic functioning of the society. However, the varnadharma system was not properly developed in the Later Vedic society

The division of social groups was based on occupation alone, and society was still flexible, where one's occupation did not depend on birth.

Even in the later times i.e., post-Vedic, the varnadharma described the ritual status of each group. The varna system did not prevent the non-kshatriyas from claiming kshatriya status and becoming rulers (examples being the Nandas and the Mauryas) nor brahmanas from claiming political suzerainty (e.g. the Sunḡa kings). (You will read about these in Block 5.)

Thus the theoretical model of the varna system could never be rigidly enforced in the post-Vedic period.

It is likely that during the Later Vedic period, with the shift in the geographical focus, the Vedic people encountered many non-Vedic tribes and considerable interaction must have helped formation of a composite society. At least the Atharvaveda depicts a host of non-Vedic religious practices which were sanctioned by the priests. However, tribal endogamy through strict marriage rules, was the aim in order to maintain the purity of the tribe. Also, the growing importance of the kshatriyas and the brahmanas in the society made it imperative to maintain their exclusive superior status, as compared to the rest. During the Later Vedic period however, the concept of varna was rudimentary in nature. The notion of untouchability for instance is absent.

Gotra: The institution of gotra (literally meaning-cow pen) appeared during this period. As against tribal endogamy (marriage within tribe) people practised gotra exogamy (marrying outside the gotra). Gotra signified descent from a common ancestor and marriages could not take place between couples belonging to the same gotra.

Family: The patriarchal family was well established and the grihapati acquired a special status. Since householding economy was gaining predominance, the position of the householder too acquired economic importance. The rights on land were based on usage, and communal ownership of land prevailed. The grihapatis were wealthy and their ritual role was that of a yajamana (i.e. he who orders sacrifice). Their wealth did not come from gifts, but was produced by their own efforts. Through yajnas, which they were bound to perform to gain merit, a part of their wealth got channelled to the brahmanas. Despite the presence of some women philosophers and the references to a few queens participating in the coronation rituals, women were considered subordinate to men, and were not involved in any major decision making.

Three stages of life: Three ashramas, i.e. stages of life were prescribed and these stages were represented by the brahmachari (studentship), grihastha (householder), vanaprasthi (partial retirement from householding life by living in the forest). It seems that the fourth i.e. the sanyasa (or complete retirement from active participation in the world) stage of life was not known till the time that the upanishads were written. The sanyasis or the ascetics in later periods were individuals who protested either passively or actively against the Vedic social structure.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) In the Later Vedic period: Tick (✓) the right statement.
 - i) pastoralism can be said to be the main subsistence activity.
 - ii) mixed farming which included cultivation and herding were the main subsistence activity.
 - iii) only labour intensive agriculture was practised.
 - iv) industry was the main activity.

- 2) In the Later Vedic period: Tick (✓) the right statement.
- tribe was the only basis for organising the society.
 - land became more important and tribe ownership of land gradually changed to family ownership.
 - the ownership of land was outside the tribe
 - none of these
- 3) During the Later Vedic period: Tick (✓) the right statement.
- sabha became more important than samiti.
 - samiti became more important than sabha.
 - the importance of both sabha and samity declined.
 - none of the above.
- 4) The Later Vedic period people, tick (✓) the right statement.
- began to marry within their own gotra.
 - married outside their gotra.
 - did not care whether they married within their own gotra or not.
 - none of the above.
- 5) What was the family in the Later Vedic phase? Answer in about fifty words.

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13.6 RELIGION

The texts of this period indicate two different religious traditions:

- the Vedic, which is documented in the Sama and Yajurveda samhitas and the Brahmanas, and
- the non-vedic or perhaps the folk tradition extensively documented in the Atharvaveda.

The fact that the Atharvan religious tradition was considered to be part of the Vedic suggests assimilation of different cultures and beliefs into the Vedic religious system. The Yajurveda Samhita and Brahmanas document the sacrificial religion of the period. Sacrifices became very important during this period and they assumed both a public and private character. The public sacrifices e.g. the Rajasuyas, Vajapeya, Asvamedha were conducted on a massive scale, where the whole community participated. Some of the rituals performed in these sacrifices show elements of a fertility cult. For instance the Asvamedha yajna required the chief queen to lie next to the sacrificial horse, where the queen represented the earth, and this ritual was thought to ensure the prosperity for the king. A number of agricultural rituals were performed in the Rajasuya and the Vajapeya yajna. The periodical rejuvenation of the earth and its fertility are some of the themes which were included in the ceremonial yajnas.

13.6.1 Priestcraft

Later vedic texts reveal the elaboration of rituals which were complicated and needed professional men, trained in the art of performing them. Vidhis or rules for performing the sacrifices were formulated and the Vedic sacrifices no longer meant simple offering of food/oblations in to the fire. The types of offering, types of sacrifices etc. differed according to the needs of the patron or the yajamana. Sacrifices were now endowed with mystical symbolism and every ritual act was endowed by mysterious power. A new science of priestcraft emerged because of the complexities involved in the performance of these yajnas whether private or public. Thus a class of priests became specialists in the performances of Yajnas. There were

even different sets of priests for performing different stages of the same sacrificial ritual.

13.6.2 The Changing Gods

Two prominent Early Vedic gods, Indra and Agni lost their importance. Prajapati the creator became important. This phenomenon also represents the importance of sedentism now, since creation myths are important in the agrarian groups. Rudra, a minor deity in the Rigveda, became important now and Vishnu was conceived as the creator and protector of the universe. Pushan who protected cattle in the former period now became the god of the Sudras. The changing status of the deities are in indication of the change in the character of the tribes from pastoral groups to sedentary agriculturist groups. The Early Vedic gods who represented natural phenomena were slowly discarded and the personification of natural elements as divine beings became very complex. It was no longer easy to find the natural element which represented a particular god from the hymns of the Later Vedic period.

13.6.3 Folk Tradition

The Atharvaveda is a mine of information regarding the folk tradition. Its contents are radically different from the Vedic sacrificial religion and it is concerned more with magic. The contents of this Veda cover different aspects of human life. The hymns deal with:

- the cure for diseases
- prayers for health
- charms for the prosperity of home and children
- cattle and fields
- charms to produce harmony
- charms concerned with love and marriage or conversely rivalry and jealousy etc.

The Atharvaveda thus documents the kinds of superstition and beliefs which were prevalent. The term Atharvan indicates a magical formula and the Atharvan priests officiated in this religion. Gods of the Vedic tradition were invoked but the reasons for which they were invoked were trivial and individualistic. Many godlings and spirits such as pisacas, rakshasas and so on (some malevolent and some benevolent), were invoked either to bring good fortune or to cause havoc and destruction to one's friends and foes respectively. The invocations and the chants related to the domestic and the household and were close to the daily cycles of existence of the common man.

For example, Indra was asked to kill the houserobber, the worm in the body and the wolf devil. The Asvins were entrusted with the protection of agriculture and the killing of rats. Savitri was summoned to fix a place where a new home could be built. Pusan was invoked to bring harmony and safe delivery of babies, while Surya was invoked to remove demons.

Towards the end of this period, a strong reaction against the priestly domination and against the complexities involved in the yajnas resulted in the formulation of a philosophical doctrine which is enunciated in the Upanisads. These texts emphasized the knowledge of the atma or the soul as against ritualistic practices and the wasteful expenditure which accompanied sacrifices. Thus the materialistic aspect of the religion was discarded and religion was raised to the realm of philosophy. The Upanisads emphasized the changelessness and indestructibility of the soul which in a way seemed to emphasize the need for stability and integration in a period when the janapadas and mahajanapadas, i.e. republics and monarchies were emerging.

Thus we find that a great change in religious beliefs and practices had taken place between the Early Vedic and the Later Vedic period. This change was partly related to the shift from pastoralism to agriculture. The religious changes of this period parallel and reflect the socio-political and economic changes that had taken place from the Early Vedic to the Later Vedic phase.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) In the Later Vedic period: Tick (✓) the right statement.
 - i) public and private sacrifices became very important.

- ii) sacrifices had no role.
 - iii) sacrifices became important because priests came to play an important role.
 - iv) both (i) and (iii).
- 2) It can be said that: Tick (✓) the right statement.
- i) the important Later Vedic and Early Vedic gods were the same.
 - ii) the important Later Vedic and Early Vedic gods were the different.
 - iii) the gods in Later Vedic period reflected the change in the character of society from nomadic to a settled one.
 - iv) both (ii) and (iii).
- 3) What does the changing status of gods in Later Vedic phase indicate? Answer in about 50 words.

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13.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you got to know:

- that the Vedic society was changing from pastoral later nomadic lifestyle to a settled agricultural society but iron was yet to play an important role in agriculture
- that in the process well defined political units were established, laws were codified and a distinct social stratification emerged.
- that the vedic and the folk religious tradition of this period were increasingly coming together while maintaining their identity.
- that in this process of change some minor gods of early vedic period e.g. Rudra, became more important while the earlier important gods e.g. Indra became less important.
- that both the literary and archaeological sources of this period have to be read together to get an overall picture of the period.

13.8 KEY WORDS

Consecration: The process of giving importance or legitimacy.

Double Cropping: To grow two crops on one piece of land simultaneously.

Endogamy: Marrying within e.g. within a tribe, caste or a gotra etc.

Exogamy: Marriage outside e.g. a caste, gotra etc.

Fertility Cult: A ritual/religious practice where human birth or process of birth is emphasised.

Folk Tradition: Traditions of the common people.

Gift Economy: An economy in which gifts play an important role in maintaining its institutions.

Labour Intensive: An activity where labour or manpower is used relatively more than technology.

Sedentary: Stationary or remaining at one place.

Stratification: Division in to levels; e.g. social stratification means division of society in to different kinds according to some criteria e.g. caste, wealth etc.

Subsistence Activity: Activity relating to economic survival, mixed farming in this case.

13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) ii)
- 2) iv)
- 3) ii)
- 4) See Section 13.3. Your answer should comment on whether iron had become important for war or daily use and why?

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) ii)
- 2) ii)
- 3) i)
- 4) ii)
- 5) See Sub-sec. 13.5.2. Your answer should comment on importance of the family, importance of householder, position of women in family.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) iv)
- 2) iv)
- 3) See Sub-sec. 13.6.2. Your answer could comment on whether the new gods indicated a new kind of society.

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

Bridget and Raymond Allchin	<i>The Rise of Civilizations in India and Pakistan</i> , New Delhi, 1988.
D.P. Agrawal and D.K. Chakravarti (ED)	<i>Essays in Indian Protohistory</i> , New Delhi, 1979.
H.D. Sankalia	<i>Prehistory and Protohistory of India and Pakistan</i> , Poona, 1962.
D.D. Kosambi,	<i>The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline</i> , New Delhi, 1987.
D.N. Jha	<i>Ancient India: An Introductory Outline</i> , New Delhi, 1986.
A.L. Basham	<i>The Wonder that was India</i> , New Delhi, 1986.
Romila Thapar	<i>History of India</i> , Vol. I New Delhi, 1983.

UNIT 14 JANAPADAS AND THE MAHAJANAPADAS

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 The Vedic Age and the Sixth Century B.C.
- 14.3 Our Sources of Information
- 14.4 Units of Settlement-I : The Janapada
- 14.5 Emergence of New Groups
 - 14.5.1 Gahapati
 - 14.5.2 Merchants
 - 14.5.3 Ruler and the Ruled
- 14.6 Units of Settlement-II: The Mahajanapada
 - 14.6.1 The Story of Jivaka
 - 14.6.2 Villages
 - 14.6.3 Towns and Cities
- 14.7 The Sixteen Mahajanapadas
- 14.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.9 Key Words
- 14.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- distinguish between the society of the sixth century B.C. and that of the earlier period,
- learn about the emergence of new groups in the society during the sixth century B.C., and
- get a detailed information about the various Janapadas and Mahajanapadas which came into prominence.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

You must have observed this fact that people around you speak the same language. Not only this, the entire region seems to celebrate the same festivals. The people of the entire region tend to have similarities in their marriage customs too. The food they cook will also be similar. How did areas having cultural homogeneity come into existence? The beginnings of this process go back to the emergence of Janapadas. The emergence of Janapadas signified the birth of geography in Indian history. Remember, when we discussed the Vedic society we did not talk about specific geographical regions. That was because people were not attached to any particular area. With the settlements of agriculturists coming up, the settlers formed enduring ties with their surrounding landscape. They observed the hills and rivers, birds and animals and fruits that were found in that area. Not only this, this was the time when they learnt to call a particular geographical space as their own. This geographical space was separated from those of the other communities (Janapadas) who might be friendly or hostile to them. These Janapadas characterised by cohesion inside and separation from the outside world, proved to be a seminal development in ancient India. These units or Janapadas became the centres for the development of uniform language, customs and beliefs.

14.2 THE VEDIC AGE AND THE SIXTH CENTURY B.C.

When we talk about Janapadas, we have to refer to a number of things associated with the emergence of the Janapadas. Since the Janapadas are known from about the sixth century B.C., we can say that in the regions in which the Janapadas of this period are found, many

changes took a concrete shape. Villages, towns and cities were the units where the people lived in a Janapada. You may have noticed that when we discussed various aspects of early Vedic and later Vedic society we did not refer to people living in such varieties of settlements as villages, towns and cities, although they did live in modest settlements. Further, this was the time when kings and monarchs emerged on the stage of history. This was also the age of intense philosophical speculation. Buddhism, Jainism and many other heterodox sects emerged during this period. Monks, monarchs and merchants crowd the canvas of history. Thus in various respects the period that we shall be studying now (approximately 6th century B.C. to 4th century B.C.) will reveal to us the changes that continued to take place in Indian society after what we discussed in Block 3.

14.3 OUR SOURCES OF INFORMATION

We find information about the Janapadas and the Mahajanapadas from some Vedic and the Buddhist texts. The **Brahmanas** refer to a category of Vedic texts which deal with the methods of performing Vedic rituals. Similarly, the **Upanishadas** dealing with philosophical problems are also considered a part of the Vedic literature. These texts were composed from 800 B.C. onwards. They refer to many Janapadas and Mahajanapadas and provide us insights into the settlement of agricultural communities. Another category of sources providing us information about this period are the texts composed by the Buddhists. The **Vinaya Pitaka** dealing with the rules of the order, the **Sutta Pitaka** a collection of Buddha's sermons and the **Abhidhamma Pitaka** discussing problems of metaphysics, tell us about the preachers, princes, rich, poor and towns and villages of that period. The **Jatakas** dealing with the stories of the previous births of the Buddha are part of the **Sutta Pitaka**. They give us graphic descriptions of the contemporary society. These texts have clear references to various regions and geographical divisions. The archaeologists also contribute to our understanding of this period. They have dug up various places like Ahichchhatra, Hastinapur, Kausambi and Ujjaini, Sravasti, Vaisali and many more which are mentioned in the texts of this period. They have discovered the remains of the houses, buildings, towns and objects used by the people. For example, the archaeological finds from this period indicate the use of a deluxe pottery called the NBPW to which reference has already been made in Block 3. In the settlements of the previous period, the people either did not know the use of iron or used it sparingly. In the 6th century B.C. people were using iron tools on a large scale. Prosperous agricultural settlements and towns have also been reported in the excavations. Thus, the archaeological and literary sources put together provide us with a more complete picture of the Indian society between the 6th and the 4th centuries B.C.

14.4 UNITS OF SETTLEMENT-I: THE JANAPADA

The contemporary texts indicate that changes in society and economy were taking place in a well defined geographical space. The literature relating to the period that we are discussing refers to various kinds of units of settlement. They are referred to as Mahajanapada, Janapada, Nagara, Nigama, Grama etc. Let us first see what the Janapadas were.

Janapada, literally meaning the place where the people place their feet, is often referred to in the texts of this period. You remember the meaning of Jana. In the Vedic society, it referred to members of a clan. In the early Vedic society the members of **Jana** were pastoral groups roaming in search of pastures. However, in the later Vedic phase the members of **Jana** took up agriculture and began to settle down. These agricultural settlements were called Janapadas. In the initial phases these settlements were named after the dominant Kshatriya lineages settled in that area. For example, the areas around Delhi and upper U.P. were known as the Kuru and Panchal Janapadas after the names of the dominant Kshatriya lineages. Once they settled down in one place there was an expansion of agriculture, especially with the use of iron axes and plough shares. These iron tools could clear the forests and dig deeper than the stone or copper tools available to the agriculturists of the preceding centuries. The middle Gangetic Valley i.e. the area east of Allahabad was suited to wet rice cultivation. Rice yields are higher than wheat yields per acre. All this would lead to gradual agricultural expansion as also growth of population. The chiefs of the lineages, at war with each other, had more to loot and defend. This was because besides cattle, now agricultural and other products were also available in larger quantities. Through the process

of agricultural expansion, war and conquest the Vedic tribes had come in closer contact with each other, and with the non-Aryan population. This in fact had led to the formation of larger territorial entities. For example, the Panchalas represented the coming together of five smaller tribes.

Some of the Janapadas were to develop into Mahajanapadas by the sixth century B.C. This happened as a result of a series of changes in the internal socio-political structure of the Janapadas. One such important change was the expansion of agricultural communities. This is indicated by the fact that the contemporary texts list agricultural land as a very important economic asset. These texts discuss the varieties of rice in as much details as did the Vedic texts discuss the varieties of cows. Let us see what the changes were.

14.5 EMERGENCE OF NEW GROUPS

One very important change was the emergence of new categories and groups of people in the society. Let us look at this aspect in some details.

14.5.1 Gahapati

A Gahapati was the master of an individual household which owned land. A Brahman Gahapati is said to have owned so much of land that he needed five hundred ploughs to get it cultivated. In the later Vedic society it was the 'Vis' which performed agricultural activities. Land was jointly owned by the lineage. With the emergence of agricultural society land became an important form of wealth. As such the ruling clans of the Kshatriyas and Brahmanas brought it under their control. Out of these groups emerged the Gahapati, who signified the disintegration of joint ownership and the emergence of big individual landowners. The Gahapatis got their land cultivated by slaves (*dasa*), hired labourers (*karmakara*) and Shudras. People captured during war were made slaves. The impoverished members of the tribe also joined the ranks of the labourers. The use of dependent labour was indicative of the emergence of a deprived class whose labour was being used to produce surplus food. The product of the land would not go to the Sudra or the *dasa* but to the master i.e. the Gahapati.

14.5.2 Merchants

It was possibly from the ranks of the Gahapatis that an important class of traders emerged. Through the sale of their produce they built up a certain amount of capital which was used for trading. The word frequently used for trader in the Buddhist sources is *Setthi*, meaning 'a person having the best'. It shows that the people who dealt with money matters had acquired considerable prestige and power. The Brahmanical sources generally looked down on trading and the *vaisyas*, who were generally associated with trading. However, by the sixth century B.C. trade and merchandise became an independent sphere of economic activity. The traders lived in cities and their emergence is related to the emergence of towns and cities in the period. These merchants traded over very large areas. By trading among different principalities they created a possibility for kings to try and control larger areas visited by merchants. Thus by the sixth century B.C. a class of free peasants and merchants had emerged. They had freed themselves from clan obligations of sharing surplus food or wealth with the other members of the lineage as was the case earlier. Private property in farm animals, in land and its produce had emerged as the dominant economic reality of the time.

14.5.3 Ruler and the Ruled

Combined with developments in the socio-economic field were changes in the nature of polity in the Mahajanapadas. In the preceding period the word *Raja* referred to the chief of a lineage. For example, Rama whose legends are related to this period, is often referred to as *Raghukularaja* meaning one who rules over the Raghu clan. Similarly, Yudhishthira is called *Kuru raja*. They ruled over their lineage and the notion of a ruler ruling over a territory had not emerged. The taxes collected from the kinsmen were largely voluntary tributes. The king was considered a generous father figure ensuring the prosperity of the lineage. He did not have an independent taxation system or army. The references to kings in the sixth century

B.C. on the other hand indicate his rule over a territory with a regular taxation system and army. There are references to **Krsaka** i.e. peasants who paid taxes to the king. Now the peasant and the army were not linked in any kinship tie with the Raja. The distinction was now between Raja and Praja. The Praja included people from the non-lineage groups also. A standing army implied control over local peasantry through force and an attitude of permanent confrontation with the people and kings of the neighbouring territories. The cattle raids of the preceding period were replaced by organised campaigns in which territory was annexed and agriculturists and traders were forced to pay taxes. Officials entrusted with the work of tax collection are repeatedly mentioned. An official called **bhagadugha** collected **bhaga** i.e. a share of the agricultural produce. Survey of the agricultural land was done by an official called **Rajjugahaka**. The **Jatakas** mention royal officials measuring out grain to send it to the King's granary. The Mahajanapadas did not bear the name of the dominant Kshatriya lineage in most of the cases. For example Kosala, Magadha, Avanti and Vatsa were not named after any Kshatriya lineages.

Thus we see that a new kind of political system had emerged by the 6th century B.C. The chief of the tribe who used to raid enemy territory and distribute the loot among his followers was transformed into a King having an army unfettered by tribal loyalties. The army was paid out of the revenues collected from the cultivators. The Vedic chief's desire for glory and sacrifices led to his breaking away from the lineage. The tribe would not be interested in fighting wars in distant areas and would oppose any regular tax for the maintenance of the army. This the King needed for his glory and power. The King's authority was not based on the distribution of wealth among the fellow tribesmen. It was based on breaking coherent lineage groups and recognising individuals and groups who would produce wealth. Some of this wealth was taken away from its producers in the form of taxes. In a lineage society where everyone was regarded as everyone else's relative such arbitrary taking away of wealth by the chief would not be allowed. The new King levied taxes and protected the peasants and merchants from internal and external aggression.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How have the historians combined the archaeological and literary evidences, regarding the material culture in the 6th century B.C.? Answer in five lines.

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- 2) Write two lines each on the new groups that emerged in this period.

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- 3) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×).

- i) The people in the 6th century B.C. did not know the use of iron.
- ii) According to the contemporary texts no important changes were taking place in the society of that period.
- iii) The Janapadas were essentially the agricultural settlements and were named after the main Kshatriya lineages in that area.
- iv) Some of the Mahajanapadas soon developed into Janapadas.

14.6 UNITS OF SETTLEMENT II: THE MAHAJANAPADA

A new type of society marked by the presence of the Gahapati; the merchant and the relationship between the ruler and the ruled was reflected in new kinds of politico-geographical units called the Mahajanapadas. The word Mahajanapada means large Janapadas like those of Magadha, Kosala etc., ruled by powerful kings or oligarchies. In fact, many of the Mahajanapadas of the sixth century B.C. came up by incorporating Janapadas which were previously autonomous. For example, Kosala Mahajanapada included the Janapada of the Sakyas and of Kashi. Magadha came to include the Janapadas of Anga, Vajji, etc. even before it grew into an empire. The new society which is reflected in the contemporary Buddhist texts can be seen in the story of Jivaka. Historians read these stories to understand the hopes, ambitions, and struggles of men of those days and their contemporary social milieu.

14.6.1 The Story of Jivaka

The story of Jivaka, the famous physician comes to us from the time of the Buddha. In the city of Rajagriha (Rajpur, near Patna) there was a prince named Abhaya. He saw an abandoned baby on a street. He brought him home and ordered the maid servants to take care of the child. The boy was called Jivaka.

When Jivaka grew up, he wondered what he should do for a living. He decided that he would become a physician (**Vaidya**). In those days Taxila was a famous centre of learning. Jivaka decided to go there to learn medicine.

Jivaka stayed in Taxila for seven years. He studied hard under the guidance of a famous medicine man. At the end of his apprenticeship his teacher took a test. He asked Jivaka to look around the surroundings at Taxila and bring some plants which could not be used for medicinal purposes. Jivaka went out and looked about as carefully as he could for some plants which were useless for medicine. When he returned the teacher asked him, "How many plants did you find?" Jivaka said, "Sir, I could not find a single plant which did not have any medicinal value". The teacher was very pleased and said that his education was complete.

Jivaka set out for Rajagriha. He ran out of money after he had covered half the distance only. He looked for some work and found out that the wife of a wealthy merchant had been ill for seven years. Jivaka cured her. The merchant gave him lots of money. Thus, Jivaka came back to Rajagriha. In Rajagriha Jivaka became the private physician of the King Bimbisara. Bimbisara was so impressed with his skill that he used to send him to look after the Buddha. Thus Jivaka came in contact with the Buddha. He gave lots of gifts to the Buddhist monks.

Just compare the setting of the story with the happenings in the early Vedic society. No cattle raids, no sacrifices and no priests. The story points to the existence of flourishing urban settlements and the important characters of the story are an abandoned child who chooses to become a physician, a merchant (**Sresthin**) a king (Bimbisara) and the Buddha, exponent of a new doctrine. And look at the geographical range—the early vedic Aryans seem to have been ranging the plains of Punjab in search of pastures. Jivaka travels all the way from Bihar to the north-western border of Punjab. This would mean that he covered a distance of more than two thousand kilometres to be able to learn the practice of medicine. These new kinds of settlements, new kinds of occupations and new networks of roads are symptomatic of a changed historical situation.

Jivaka moved in a world of new kinds of settlement i.e. the city. The city flourished in a universe of prosperous villages. Village was the basic unit of the socio-political organisation of Mahajanapadas. And so we take a round of the village in the sixth century B.C.

14.6.2 Villages

In the Mahajanapadas the basic unit of settlement was the **Gama** (which in Prakrit and Pali languages is the equivalent of Sanskrit **grama**) meaning a village. Remember the **Gramas** of

the early Vedic times. It used to be a mobile unit of people and when two **gramas** came together it led to **Sangrama** (literally coming together of villages) i.e. battle. This was because they were mobile units and when two hostile **gramas** met it led to attempts at snatching away each other's cattle. The villages of the sixth century B.C. were settlements where people generally pursued agricultural activities. (This signifies a shift from a pastoral to agricultural activities). There were various kinds of small and large villages inhabited by a single household or many families. The households seem to have been part of an extended kin group, meaning that everyone was related to everyone else in the villages. However, with the emergence of families who had large landholdings and who employed the labour of **dasas**, **karmakaras** and **porisas**, villages inhabited by non-kinship groups also came into existence. There are references to land ownership and tenancy rights of varied kinds. **Kassaka** and **ksetrika** denoted the common peasants who were generally of the Sudra **jati**. The leaders of the villages were called **Gamini**. The **Gamini** are also referred to as soldiers, elephant and horse-trainers and stage managers. The trend towards increasing craft specialisation is evident from references to villages of cattlekeepers, ironsmiths, wood workers, etc. These references to villages specialising in activities other than agricultural operations are indicative of increasing trade and prospering economy. This is because the villagers who were not producing their own food must have got their food from other villages. This suggests that regular exchange of goods had become an integral part of the economic life of the people. Also their specialisation in one craft is indicative of the fact that there was a large scale demand for the goods produced by them.

14.6.3 Towns and Cities

Towns and cities dominated by Kings and merchants but at the same time containing a heterogeneous population were the new kinds of settlement which came into existence during this period. They are variously referred to as **Pura**, **Nigma** and **Nagara**. The differences among these settlements are not clear. They probably referred to the size as well as varying features of the settlements. These towns and cities were substantially larger than the villages. Contemporary literature refers to big cities like Ayodhya and Varanasi covering anywhere between thirty to fifty square kilometres of area. These accounts are exaggerated as the excavations conducted in these cities show modest settlements in this period. In no period did the size exceed five square kilometres in circuit. However, this historic phase is associated with settlements using a deluxe pottery called the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW). The settlements witnessed an increase in trade and population. Massive fortifications have been found around the cities of Kausambi, Ujjaini, Rajghat (Varanasi), and Rajgir. What is clear from the references in literature is the fact that the cities had emerged as the focus of power and control over the Mahajanapada. The Kings ruled from their cities. The newly emerging merchant class controlled trade from these centres, especially after the introduction of coinage.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) If you were a historian, what inferences would you draw from the story of Jivaka? Write in about 100 words.

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- 2) How does archaeology correct the literary evidence about the cities? Write in five lines.

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14.7 THE SIXTEEN MAHAJANAPADAS

In the previous section we discussed the literary and archaeological evidences for the presence of the basic units of settlement in the sixth century B.C. Now we shall discuss references to the sixteen Mahajanapadas in ancient literature. The Buddhist sources refer to the presence of sixteen Mahajanapadas in the period when the Buddha lived. The Mahajanapadas and their major settlements are found mentioned repeatedly when references to the Buddha are made in the Buddhist texts. The exact dates of the Buddha's life are still disputed by historians. It is however generally believed that the Buddha's life spanned parts of both 6th and 5th centuries B.C. and Buddhist texts referring to his life are therefore taken to reflect the society of this period. The list of Mahajanapadas varies from text to text. However, we can get a fair idea of the political and economic conditions of various regions of India by studying these lists. These Mahajanapadas represented a conglomerate of thousands of villages and a few cities. These Mahajanapadas extended from the North-Western Pakistan to East Bihar and from the submontane regions of the Himalayas to the river Godavari in the South.

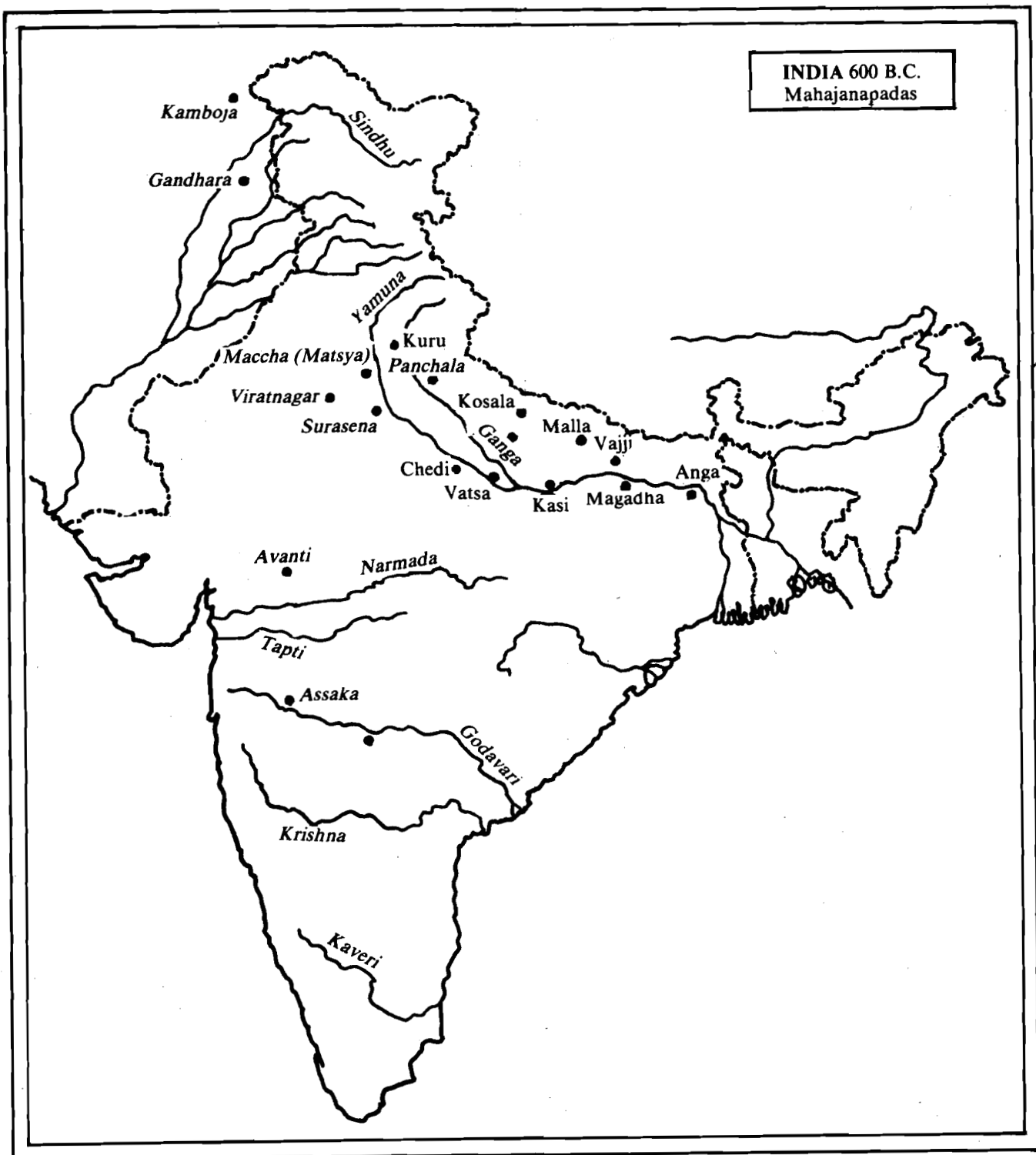
The Buddhist text **Anguttara Nikaya** which is a part of the **Sutta-Pitaka** gives the following list of sixteen Mahajanapadas in the time of Buddha:

- | | |
|------------|---------------------|
| 1) Kashi | 9) Kuru |
| 2) Kosala | 10) Panchala |
| 3) Anga | 11) Maccha (Matsya) |
| 4) Magadha | 12) Surasena |
| 5) Vajji | 13) Assaka |
| 6) Malla | 14) Avanti |
| 7) Chedi | 15) Gandhara |
| 8) Vatsa | 16) Kamboja |

Another Buddhist work, the **Mahavastu**, gives a similar list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas. However, it omits Gandhara and Kamboja which were located in the north-west. These are substituted by Sibi and Dasarna in Punjab and Central India respectively. Similarly the Jaina work **Bhagavati Sutra** gives a widely different list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas, which includes Vanga and Malaya. The number sixteen seems to have been conventional and the lists varied because regions important to the Buddhists and the Jains came to be included in their lists. The lists indicate a gradual shift of focus to the middle Gangetic Valley because most of the Mahajanapadas were located in this area. Let us survey the history and geography of these Mahajanapadas.

1) Kashi

Of the sixteen Mahajanapadas, Kashi seems to have been the most powerful in the beginning. Located in and around the present day Varanasi district, its capital Varanasi is referred to as the foremost city of India situated on the confluence of the Ganges and the Gomati rivers and in the midst of fertile agricultural tracts. Kashi was famous for its cotton textiles and market for horses. Excavations at the site of Rajghat which has been identified with ancient Benaras have not yielded any impressive evidence for urbanisation in the 6th century B.C. It seemed to have emerged as a major town around 450 B.C. However, we know that the orange brown robes of the Buddhist monks were called Kashaya in Sanskrit which was made in Kashi. This indicates that Kashi had emerged as a cloth manufacturing centre and market by the time of Buddha.



Map 1. Mahajanapadas.

Several Kings of Kashi are mentioned as having conquered Kosala and many other Kingdoms. Interestingly enough, the earliest available version of the Rama story 'the Dasaratha Jataka' mentions Dasaratha, Rama etc. as Kings of Kashi and not of Ayodhya. The father of Parsva, the twenty-third teacher (**Tirthankara**) of the Jains, is said to have been the King of Benaras. The Buddha also delivered his first sermon in Samath near Benaras. All important religious traditions of ancient India associated themselves with Kashi. However, by the time of the Buddha the Kashi Mahajanapada had been annexed by Kosala and was a cause of war between Magadha and Kosala.

2) Kosala

The Mahajanapada of Kosala was bounded on the west by the river Gomati. To its east flowed the river Sadanira which separated it from the Videha Janapada. Towards the north it skirted the Nepal hills while the river Syandika defined its southern boundary. Literary references indicate how Kosala emerged out of an assimilation of many smaller principalities and lineages. For example, we know that the Sakyas of Kapilavastu were under the control of Kosala. The Buddha calls himself a Kosalan in the **Majjhima Nikaya**. But at the same time the Kosalan King Vidudhaba is said to have destroyed the Sakyas. It would only indicate that the Sakya lineage was under the nominal control of the Kosalas. The newly emergent monarchy established a centralized control and thus destroyed the autonomy of the Sakyas. Names of Kings like Hiranyanabha, Mahakasala Prasenajita and Suddhodana are mentioned as rulers of Kosala in the 6th century B.C. These rulers are said to have ruled from Ayodhya, Saketa, Kapilavastu or Sravasti. Probably, in the early years of the sixth century B.C. the area of Kosala was under the control of many smaller chiefships ruling from small towns. Towards the end of the 6th century B.C. kings like Prasenajita and Vidudhaba managed to bring all other chiefships under their control. They ruled from Sravasti. Thus, Kosala became a prosperous Kingdom having three big cities under its control i.e. Ayodhya, Saketa and Sravasti. Kosala also annexed the Kingdom of Kashi in its territory. The Kings of Kosala favoured both Brahmanism and Buddhism. King Prasenajita was a contemporary and friend of the Buddha. In the succeeding phases Kosala proved to be one of the most formidable adversaries of the emergent Magadhan empire.

3) Anga

Anga comprised the districts of Bhagalpur and Monghyr in Bihar. It may have extended northwards to the river Kosi and included some parts of the district of Purnea. It was located to the east of Magadha and west of the Rajamahar hills. Champa was the capital of Anga. It was located on the confluence of the rivers Champa and the Ganga. Champa has been considered one of the six great cities in the sixth century B.C. It was noted for its trade and commerce and traders sailed further east through the Ganga from here. In the middle of the sixth century B.C. Anga was annexed by Magadha. Excavations at Champa near Bhagalpur have yielded NBPW in large numbers.

4) Magadha

Magadha consisted of the areas around Patna and Gaya in south Bihar. It was protected by the rivers Son and Ganga on its north and west. Towards the south it reached upto the Chotanagpur plateau. In the east the river Champa separated it from Anga. Its capital was called Girivraja or Rajagriha. Rajagriha was an impregnable city protected by five hills. The walls of Rajagriha represent the earliest evidence of fortification in the historical India. The capital was shifted to Pataliputra somewhere in the fifth century B.C. They bear testimony to the power of the early Magadhan monarchs. In the Brahmanical texts the Magadhans were considered people of mixed origin and inferior type. This was probably because the people in this area did not follow the **varna** system and the Brahmanical rituals in the early historical times. The Buddhist tradition, on the other hand, attaches great importance to this area. The Buddha achieved enlightenment in this area. Rajagriha was one of his favourite haunts. The Magadhan monarchs Bimbisara and Ajatsatru were his friends and disciples. With its fertile agricultural tracts suited to wet rice cultivation, control over the iron ores of south Bihar and relatively open social system Magadhan became the most important Kingdom in the subsequent history. Its control over the trade routes of the Ganges, Gandak and Son rivers could provide it substantial revenues. The Magadhan king Bimbisara is said to have called an assembly of the **Gaminis** of 80,000 villages. The number might be fictitious but it indicates that Bimbisara's administration was based on the village as a unit of organisation. The **Gamini** were not his kinsmen but representatives and chiefs of villages. Thus, his power was based not on the goodwill of his kinsmen. Ajatsatru usurped the throne and starved Bimbisara to death. Magadha, as a Kingdom kept prospering with the extension

of its control over the Vajjis of Vaisali. This was to culminate in the Mauryan empire in the fourth century B.C.

5) Vajji

Centred around the Vaisali district of Bihar, the Vajjis (literal meaning pastoral nomads) were located north of the Ganga. This Mahajanapada extended upto the hills of Nepal in the north. It was separated from Kosala by the river Gandak. Unlike the Mahajanapadas previously discussed, the Vajjis had a different kind of political organisation. The contemporary texts refer to them as a **Ganasamgha**, a term which has been variously translated as a republic or an oligarchy. The **Ganasamghas** of this period represented a rule not by an all-powerful King but a joint rule by a group of Kshatriya Chiefs. This ruling class, members of which were called **rajas**, were now differentiated from different non-Kshatriya groups.

The Vajjis represented a confederacy of eight clans of whom the Videhas, Licchavis and the Jnatikas were the most well known. The Videhas had their capital at Mithila. It has been identified with Janakpur in Nepal. Although the Ramayana associates it with the king Janaka, the Buddhist sources consider it a chiefship. Licchavis, the most well known of the ancient Indian **Ganasamghas**, had their headquarters at Vaisali. Vaisali is said to have been a large and prosperous city. The Jnatikas were another clan settled somewhere in the suburbs of Vaisali. This was the clan which produced Mahavira, the Jain teacher. The other members of confederacy were the clans of the Ugras, Bhogas, Kauravas and Aiksavakas. Vaisali seems to have been the metropolis of the entire confederacy. They conducted their affairs in an assembly. Accordingly to a Jataka story the Vajjis were ruled by many clan chiefs. This Mahajanapada was a major power in the sixth century B.C. However, they do not seem to have possessed a standing army or a system of revenue collection from agriculture. The Magadhan king Ajatsatru is supposed to have destroyed this confederacy. He sowed discord among the chiefs with the help of his minister Vassakara and then attacked the Licchavis.

6) Malla

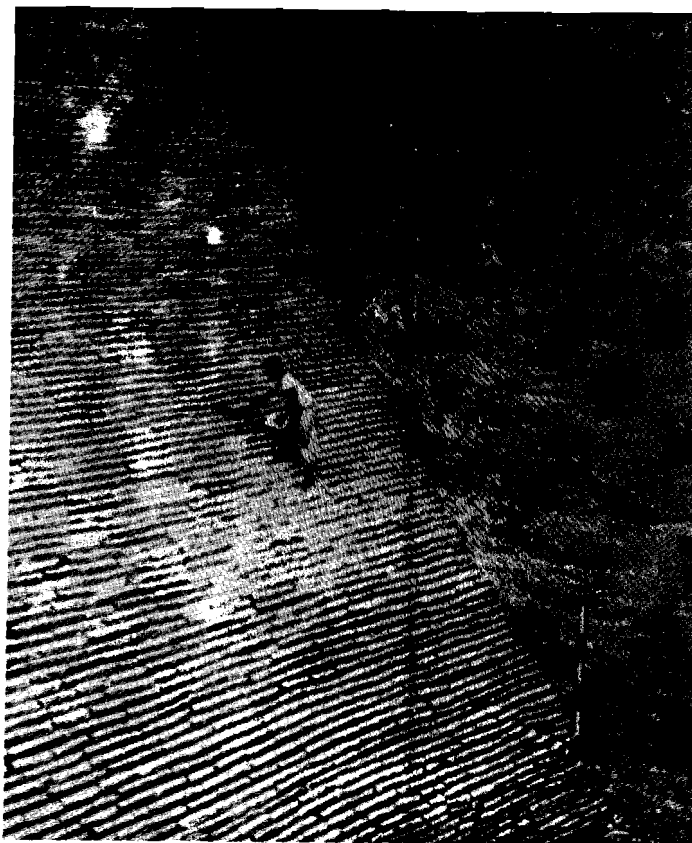
The Mallas were another Kshatriya lineage referred to as **Ganasamghas** in ancient texts. They seem to have had several branches of which two had their headquarters in the towns of Pava and Kusinagara. Kusinagara has been identified with the site of Kasia in the Gorakhpur district of U.P. There is no unanimity among the scholars about the location of Pava. The Malla territories are said to have been located to the east and south-east of the territory of the Sakyas. They are supposed to have been ruled by five hundred chiefs. The Buddha died in the vicinity of Kusinagara and his last rites were performed by the Mallas.

7) Chedi

The Chedi territory roughly corresponds to the eastern parts of the modern Bundelkhand. It might have stretched upto the Malwa plateau. Sisupala the famous enemy of Krishna, was a Chedi ruler. According to the Mahabharat the Chedis seem to have been in close touch with the chiefs of Matsya beyond the Chambal, the Kasis of Benaras and the Karusas in the valley of the river Son. Its Capital was Sothivati (Suktimati) probably located in the Banda district of M-P. Other important towns in this territory were Sahajati and Tripuri.

8) Vatsa

Vatsa with its capital at Kausambi was one of the most powerful principalities of the sixth century B.C. Kausambi has been identified with modern Kosam or the river Yamuna near Allahabad. This means that the Vatsas were settled around modern Allahabad. The **puranas** say that the descendant of the Pandavas, Nichaksu shifted his capital to Kausambi after Hastinapur had been washed away by floods. The dramatist Bhasa, has immortalized one of the Kings of the Vatsas named Udayana in his plays. These plays are based on the story of the romantic affair between Udayana and Vasavadatta, the Princess of Avanti. They also indicate the conflicts among the powerful Kingdoms of Magadha, Vatsa and Avanti. Vatsa, however, seems to have lost the ensuing struggle as the subsequent texts do not give them much importance.



1. Baked Brick Fortification (Kausambi).

9) Kuru

The Kings of the Kurus were supposed to belong to the family of Yudhisthira. They were centred around the Delhi-Meerut region. The **Arthashastra** and other texts refer to them as **Rajasabdopajivinah**, i.e., carrying the titles of Kings. This indicates some kind of a diffused structure of chiefship. That they did not have absolute monarchy is also proved by references to many political centres in this area. Hastinapura, Indraprastha, Isukara are each mentioned as the capital of the Kurus having their own chiefs.

We all know about the Kurus through the epic **Mahabharata**. It relates the story of the war of succession between the Pandavas and Kauravas. The epic has enthralled generations of Indians with its superb interweaving of themes relating to love, war, conspiracy, hatred and the larger philosophical issues relating to human existence. Historians treat it more as epic literature than an actual description of events. Large scale wars started only with the emergence of the Mahajanapadas, earlier phase being characterised by cattle raids. The **Mahabharata** also mentions Greeks who came into contact with India only around the 5th century B.C. Thus, a war involving Greeks could take place only in the first millennium B.C. Probably the **Mahabharata** story relates to an internecine war between two Kshatriya lineages which became a part of the singing tradition of the bards. With the emergence of the early historic period the social, economic and political interaction increased among the Mahajanapadas. The singing bards and Brahmanas brought in every region of India in the story of **Mahabharata**. This pleased the monarchs who could boast of an ancestor who fought in the Mahabharata war. Thus, the epic became a mechanism for the spread of the Brahmanical religious system. This is clear from the fact that in the prologue of the Mahabharata it is said that an earlier version having 24,000 stanzas was still current. The present epic has one lakh stanzas.

10) Panchala

The Panchala Mahajanapada was located in the Rohilkhand and parts of Central Doab (roughly Bareilly, Pilibhit, Badaun, Bulandshahr, Aligarh etc.) The ancient texts refer to the presence of two lineages of the Panchalas i.e. the northern Panchalas and the southern Panchalas with the river Bhagirathi forming the dividing line. The northern Panchalas had their capital at Ahicchatra located in the Bareilly district of U.P. The southern Panchalas had Kampilya as their capital. They seem to have been closely linked to the Kurus. Although

one or two Panchala chiefs are mentioned we have very little information about them. They too are called a **Samgha**. By the sixth century B.C. they seem to have become an obscure power.

11) Matsya

The Matsyas were located in the Jaipur-Bharatpur-Alwar region of Rajasthan. Their capital was at Viratnagara famed as the hiding place of the Pandavas. This region was more suitable for cattle rearing. That is why in the **Mahabharata** story when the Kauravas attacked Virat they took away cattle as booty. Obviously, Matsya could not compete with the powers that emerged on the basis of settled agriculture. It was absorbed in the Magadhan empire. Some of the most famous edicts of the King Ashoka have been found in Bairat (Jaipur district), the ancient Virat.

12) Surasena

The Surasenas had their capital at Mathura on the bank of the river Yamuna. In the **Mahabharata** and the **Puranas** the ruling family of Mathura is referred to as Yadus. The Yadava clan was divided into many smaller clans like the Andhakas, Vrishani, Mahabhojas, etc. They too had a **samgha** form of government. The epic hero Krishna is associated with these ruling families.

Mathura was located at the junction of two famous ancient Indian trade routes i.e. the Uttarapatha and the Dakshinapatha. This was because Mathura represented the transitional zone between the Gangetic plains having settled agriculture and the sparsely populated pasture lands jutting into the Malwa plateau. That is why Mathura emerged as an important city. However, because of the splintered political structure and varied landscape, the chiefs of this area could not carve out a powerful kingdom.

13) Assaka

The Assakas were inhabiting the banks of the river Godavari near modern Paithan in Maharashtra. Paithan has been identified with ancient Pratisthana, the capital of the Assakas. The Dakshinapatha or the southern route is supposed to have connected Pratisthana with the cities of the north. There are vague references to the Kings of the Assakas but our information regarding this region at this stage is very limited.

14) Avanti

Avanti was one of the most powerful Mahajanapadas in the 6th century B.C. The core area of this kingdom would roughly correspond to the Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh, extending upto the river Narmada. It had another important city Mahismati which is sometimes mentioned as its capital. Several other small and big towns are mentioned as dotting the Avanti region. The **Puranas** attribute the foundation of Avanti to one of the clans of the Yadus called the Haihaya. Located in a very fertile agricultural tract and controlling the trade coming from south this clan of the Yadus here developed into a centralized monarchy. In the 6th century B.C., a powerful King named Pradyota was ruling over Avanti. He seems to have conquered Vatsa and even Ajatsatru was afraid of him.

15) Gandhara

Gandhara was located between Kabul and Rawalpindi in North western Province. It might have included some parts of Kashmir. Although it was an important area in the early Vedic period it lost its importance in the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions of the later phases. The capital Taxila was an important city where people from all the Janapadas went for learning and trading. In the 6th century B.C. Gandhara was ruled by a King named Pukkusati. He was friendly with Bimbisara. In the later half of the sixth century B.C. Gandhara was conquered by the Persians. Excavations in the modern towns of Taxila show that this site was occupied by 1000 B.C. and some kind of township emerged subsequently. By the sixth century B.C. a city having similarities with the Gangetic Valley cities had emerged.

16) Kamboja

Kamboja was located somewhere close to Gandhara, probably around the present day Punch area. Already by the 7th century B.C., the Kambojas were regarded as uncultured by the Brahmanical texts. The **Arthashastra** calls them **varta-sastropajivin Samgha** meaning a confederation of agriculturists, herdsman, traders and warriors.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Match the name of the rulers with the name of Mahajanapadas.

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| i) Ajatsatru | A Kosala |
| ii) Pradyota | B Magadha |
| iii) Udayana | C Avanti |
| iv) Prasenajita | D Vatsa |

2) Match the name of Mahajanapadas with the name of capital.

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| i) Kashi | A Vaisali |
| ii) Anga | B Varanasi |
| iii) Vajji | C Kausambi |
| iv) Vatsa | D Champa |

14.8 LET US SUM UP

We have reviewed the political conditions prevailing in India of the sixth century B.C. The Mahajanapadas which emerged as regions where new kinds of socio-political developments were taking place were located in distinct geographical zones. What seems to be very significant is the fact that seven of them i.e. Anga, Magadha, Vajji, Malla, Kasi, Kosala, and Vatsa were located in the middle Gangetic Valley. This is a rice growing area whereas the upper Gangetic Valley is a wheat growing area. It has been observed that in the traditional agricultural system of India, rice output exceeded the wheat output. The rice producing areas had a greater density of population too. Further, Mahajanapadas like Magadha had easy access to crucial resources like metal ores. These factors might be related to the emergence of the middle Gangetic Valley as the focus of politico-economic power. The fact that so many Mahajanapadas were contiguous to each other in this area meant that an ambitious leader could try and conquer prosperous neighbouring territories. Also it would be easier to retain control over a neighbouring territory. The rulers of the Mahajanapadas of Punjab or Malwa would have to traverse empty geographical zones before they came across some prosperous territory. Thus, the flat terrain and the contiguity of settlements provided a better chance for a ruler in the middle Gangetic Valley to consolidate his power. No wonder Magadha, one of the powers in this zone, emerged as the most powerful Kingdom in the subsequent period.

14.9 KEY WORDS

Heterodox Sects: The religious movements which emerged during the sixth century B.C. They provided a challenge to the Vedic religion.

Pali: A language spoken in the areas of Magadha and Kosala. Buddhist literature was written in this language.

Prakrit: A language spoken at the time of Ashoka in Magadha. The first written material in historical India is found in this language.

Urban Settlements : Place where a significant proportion of population is engaged in activity other than food production.

14.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) In your answer you should show how literary references to specific geographical locations help archaeologists excavate towns of those times. See Section 14.3

- 2) See Section 14.5
- 3) (i) × (ii) × (iii) ✓ (iv) ×

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) As a historian you should emphasize, a) the emergence of new groups like merchants and heterodox sects, b) emergence of new kinds of settlements, and c) the long journeys undertaken by people.
- 2) See Sub-sec. 14.6.3

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) i-B; ii-C; iii-D; iv-A
- 2) i-B; ii-D; iii-A; iv-C

UNIT 15 RISE OF URBAN CENTRES

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 What is an Urban Centre?
- 15.3 The Background to the Sixth Century B.C.
- 15.4 Cities of the Sixth Century B.C.
 - 15.4.1 Types of Cities and Towns in Literature
 - 15.4.2 The Image of City in Ancient India
 - 15.4.3 A Walk through the City
 - 15.4.4 Items of Exchange
- 15.5 The City in Archaeology
- 15.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.7 Key Words
- 15.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

15.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will :

- discover the real meaning of an urban settlement and distinguish it from rural centres,
- learn the main factors which led to urbanisation during the sixth century B.C.,
- know what kind of cities existed at that time, and
- be able to list various features of city life in sixth century B.C.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

The period starting with the sixth century B.C. saw the emergence of cities in ancient India for the second time. This urbanisation was more significant in the sense that it endured for a longer time and it saw the beginnings of a literate tradition. This tradition embodied in Buddhism, Jainism and many important strands of Hinduism looks back on this period as its formative epoch. The contemporary literature is full of references to cities like Rajagriha, Sravasti, Kashi, etc. The Buddha and Mahavira were preaching to urban audiences most of the time.

After the end of the Indus cities, settled agricultural villagers and wandering people inhabited the plains of India. Small village settlements with humble dwellings dotted the landscape of the country. All this was undisturbed by the din and bustle of market places and the domination of kings and merchants. You must have heard the story of King Harishchandra famous for his truthfulness and keeping his vows. Here is the earliest version of his story from a text called the **Aitareya Brahmana**. This text can roughly be dated to the 8th-7th century B.C.

Thus goes the story—King Harishchandra did not have a son. He went upto god Varuna and prayed, “Let a son be born to me, with him let me sacrifice to thee.”

To him a son was born Rohita by name. Varuna demanded his sacrifice. The king made various kinds of excuses and kept postponing the sacrifice. However, when Rohit grew up Harishchandra told him, “O my dear one, this one (Varuna) gave thee to me. Come let me sacrifice to him with thee.” “No”, he said and taking his bow went to the wild and for a year he wandered in the wild.

Varuna was angry and as such Harishchandra was afflicted with dropsy. Rohita heard of this and decided to go back from the wild to his village. Six times he started for the village and six times he was persuaded by Indra to go back to the wild.

In the seventh year he bought a Brahmana boy called Sunahsepa from his father for a hundred coins. As such he came back to the village of Harishchandra where Sunahsepa was to be sacrificed to Varuna. When Sunahsepa was about to be sacrificed he chanted some incantation which pleased Varuna and he was saved. The king's dropsy also disappeared.

What is significant for a historian of urbanism is that King Harishchandra was not living in a city, not even in a small town but in a village adjacent to the wilds. All this changed in the sixth century B.C. You have already read in Unit 14 that the kings of the monarchical Mahajanapadas and the Kshatriya chiefs of the **gana-samghas** used to live in cities like Kausambi, Champa, Sravasti, Rajagriha and Vaisali. It is not only big cities which emerged at this time. Along with agriculture-based villages, there existed market centres, small towns, big towns and other types of settlements.



2. An Artists' view of a city in Ancient India

15.2 WHAT IS AN URBAN CENTRE?

Many scholars have tried to define an urban centre. On the face of it, it seems fairly easy to define an urban centre. But when we get down to details the problem becomes complicated. For example, some writers believe that the urban centre is characterised by a large population. However, it has been pointed out that some modern Indian villages have populations larger than those of some Australian towns. Similarly, some scholars argue that urban centres are larger in size than villages. However, it is difficult to determine a standard size for the towns. We know that some of the villages today are larger in size than say a Harappan town like Kalibangan. Thus, the number of people or the size of the settlement cannot be the reliable criteria for defining an urban or rural centre. Hence it is important to identify the kinds of activities people are performing. In a village most of the people are engaged in food production. So, the social landscape of the villages is dominated by fields and farmers. In the towns, on the other hand, the dominant people are either rulers or merchants or priests. It is possible that many people in the town might engage in agricultural activities but it is essentially the non-agricultural activities that define a town.

Let us take the example of Benaras which is among the oldest surviving cities of India. Its fame rests not on the very good quality rice produced there but on its being a very important pilgrimage centre. Benaras attracts pilgrims from all over India. These pilgrims offer various kinds of gifts to the deities in the temples. In this way the keepers of the temples are able to draw upon the resources of the people coming from all over the country. Thus, the other characteristic of an urban centre is that it functions in relationship to a large hinterland. The residents of the city might provide administrative, economic or religious services to a population residing in an area much larger than the physical space of the city. This relationship with the population of the hinterland is advantageous to the urban centre. This means that the residents of the city are able to harness the resources of the people living in the hinterland. This might be done in the form of taxation in kind or tribute. The merchant living in the city is also able to appropriate a share of the resources of rural areas by controlling the supply of metals, minerals or some luxury items. This means that the class of kings, priests and merchants living in the cities have more wealth than a common man.

These classes use their wealth for acquiring more wealth, prestige and power. Now, the rich and powerful in every society have their own way of showing off. The rich in some societies build large palaces, others build beautiful temples, still others perform grand sacrifices. Some others are content with the possession of precious metals and stones.

Apart from the kings, priests and merchants and farmers various groups of craft specialists also stay in the city who produce luxury items for the city and other objects needed by the people outside the city. These craft specialists need not enjoy the same privileges as the rich.

For example, the administrator or merchant might be very rich but blacksmiths or masons or carpenters might be quite poor. Thus, the city is characterised by the presence of rich and poor people.

We can say that an urban centre refers to a place where the most powerful and visible sections of population are engaged in activities other than food production.

Such diverse socio-economic activities create the problem of proper coordination among those engaged in them. For example, the blacksmith would need food from the cultivator or the merchant will need protection from robbers while transporting his goods to and from distant areas. In a situation where each of the groups cannot survive without the other there is a need for a centralized agency coordinating their activities. The need to keep in check hostilities between the rich and poor and the need for mobilising agricultural produce for urban consumption also create the possibilities for the emergence of a centralized power. The emergence of centralized decision-making groups coincides with the emergence of groups exercising monopoly over the use of force. This kind of social structure also implies the coming into being of a state society.

Thus, the urban society is characterised by the presence of craft specialists, rich and poor people and a state administration.

15.3 THE BACKGROUND TO THE SIXTH CENTURY B.C.

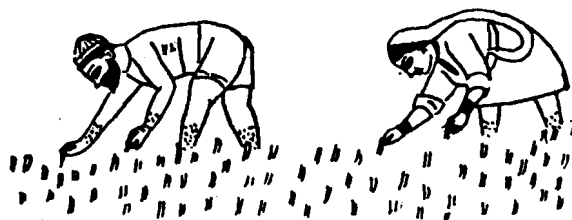
In the previous unit we discussed the emergence of Mahajanapadas and centralized polities in ancient India. We have seen how over a period of time the Brahmins emerged as a caste category, who specialized in ritual activity. Then came the class of Kshatriya warriors and landowners who gradually started levying taxes over cultivators and merchants. The later Vedic chieftains seem to have burnt up or distributed their wealth during sacrifices. The competition among the chiefs to perform more and more sacrifices on a larger and larger scale meant that they had to look for more and more booty, taxes and tribute. In this settled agricultural society agricultural produce and cattle were the most important forms of wealth. Especially agricultural produce was one form of wealth which could be augmented from year to year by either extending the cultivable land or adopting more intensive agricultural practices. The rulers' desire for more and more wealth probably led to the cultivation of more land and settling down of many more pastoralists and foragers. The archaeological records indicate that many agricultural settlements came into existence between 8th to 6th century B.C. Two factors which proved to be of great help in increasing agricultural production were the increasing use of iron tools and the practice of wet rice cultivation in the middle Gangetic Valley.

Use of Iron and Wet Rice Cultivation

By about 1000 B.C. Indians had learnt the art of smelting iron. Over the next three or four centuries iron came into increasing use. That is why a large number of iron tools and implements have been found from Ujjain, Sravasti and Hastinapur. Iron weapons in particular have been found in large numbers. These would have increased the power of the warrior classes vis-a-vis the peasants. With more powerful weapons the warrior classes could extract more wealth from the peasants. Iron weapons also increased their desire for war, conquest and booty.

Iron had a direct impact on the economy too. Iron axes could be used to clear forests and iron plough shares could facilitate agricultural operations. This was especially useful in the middle Gangetic Valley (the areas between Allahabad and Bhagalpur) where wet rice

known fact that yields per acre in wet rice cultivation are substantially higher than those of wheat or millet in traditional agriculture. As such there was much larger output of foodgrains in the rice producing middle Gangetic Valley than the wheat producing upper Gangetic Valley. It has been observed that varieties of rice and paddy fields are repeatedly mentioned in the early Buddhist texts. This indicates a decisive shift to wet rice cultivation. Larger food production made it possible to sustain increased population, which is reflected in an increase in the number of settlements in the archaeological records of this period. All this created the possibility of the emergence of social groups not engaged in food production.



3. Wet Rice Cultivation

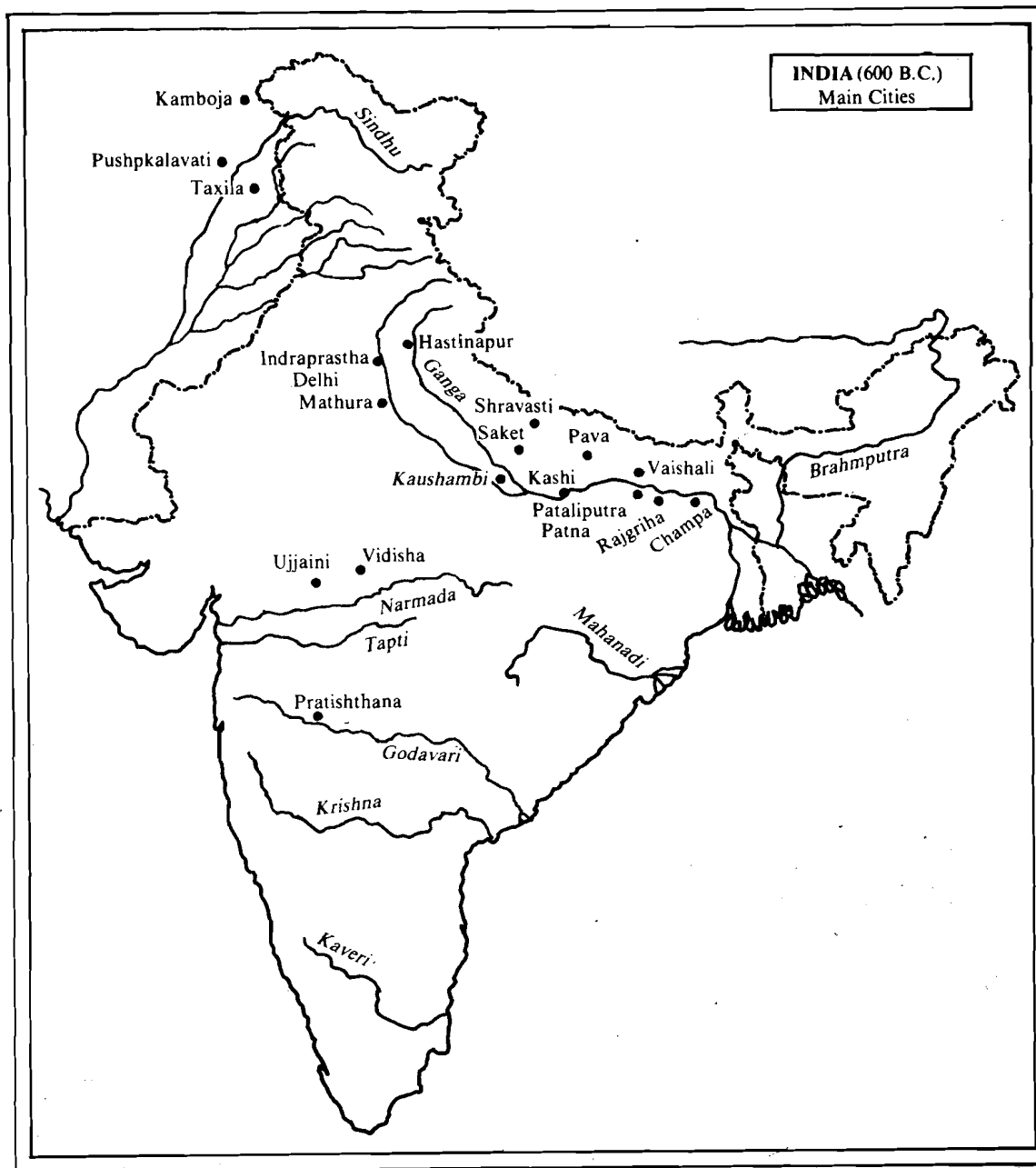
The Vedic sacrifices meant that most of the surplus accumulated by the chiefs was gifted away at the time of performing sacrifices. In the areas of the middle Gangetic Valley the Vedic rituals and sacrifices did not have the kind of hold as in the upper Gangetic Valley. This meant that the surpluses which were collected by the chiefs were not spent away during sacrifices. The groups that grew up controlling this surplus wealth became the ruling class of the newly emergent kingdoms. And on the foundation of this wealth were born the cities of the sixth century B.C.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Mark the correct answer.
For the historian of urbanism the significance of the story of Harishchandra lies in
 - A) the disobedience of the son Rohit
 - B) the buying of Sunahsepa
 - C) the fact of King Harishchandra living not in a city but in a village
 - D) the different roles played by God Varuna and Indra.
- 2) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×)
 - i) An urban centre can be distinguished from a rural centre on the basis of the number of the people and the size of the settlement.
 - ii) The increasing use of iron tools helped in increasing agricultural production.
 - iii) The wheat producing upper Gangetic Valley, produced more foodgrains than the rice producing middle Gangetic Valley.
 - iv) The making of iron weapons increased the powers of the ruling classes.

15.4 CITIES OF THE SIXTH CENTURY B.C.

Our information about the cities of the sixth century B.C. comes from many sources. This is because it was the period which saw the beginnings of the written tradition in ancient Indian History. Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain texts refer to the conditions of this period. The excavation reports of many urban and rural centres of this period also enrich our understanding.



Map 2. Main Cities

15.4.1 Types of Cities and Towns in Literature

The terms that are frequently used to denote cities in ancient Indian literature are **Pura**, **Durga**, **Nigama**, **Nagar**, etc. Let us see how the ancient Indians defined them.

Pura—the term pura is mentioned even in the early vedic literature. Where it referred to fortified settlements or temporary places of refuge or cattle pens. Later on it is often used for the residence of the king and his retinue or for the families of the ruling group in the Gana Samghas. Gradually the connotation of fortification became less important and it came to mean a city.

Durga—this is the other term used for denoting the fortified capital of a king. Fortifications protected the urban centres and separated them from the surrounding rural areas. Also, fortifications made it easier for the ruling classes to control the activities of the population residing in the city.

Nigama—it is frequently used in the Pali literature to denote a town. It probably meant a merchant town where the sale and purchase of goods used to take place. In fact some scholars believe that some of the **Nigamas** evolved out of villages specializing in pottery, carpentry or salt making. That the **Nigamas** were market towns is also proved by the fact that certain coins of a later period carrying the legend '**Nigama**' have been found. These coins indicate that they were minted by the **Nigama**. Sometimes literary texts would refer to a particular section of a city as **Nigama** where craft specialists would live and work.

Nagara—it is the most commonly used word for a town or city in literature. This word is used for the first time in the **Taittiriya Aranyaka**. This text has been roughly dated to the 7th 6th century B.C. Another word **Mahanagara** also referred to cities. These centres combined the political functions of the **Pura** and the commercial functions of the **Nigama**. Kings, merchants and preachers resided in these cities.

The Buddhist literature refers to six **Mahanagaras**. All of them were located in the middle Gangetic Valley. They were Champa, Rajagriha, Kashi, Sravasti, Saketa and Kausambi. Other terms like Pattana, Sthaniya etc. are also used to refer to towns and cities.

It appears that the terms **Pura** and **Durga** are amongst the earliest terms used in Indian literature for denoting a town. Other terms came in use in subsequent phases. What is significant for us is that both these terms referred to fortified settlements. This might indicate that kings and their followers lived in fortified settlements. They extracted taxes from the surrounding population. Their ability to store wealth and collect luxury items might have stimulated trade. Thus, these fortified settlements led to the development of a network of relationships. This led to the emergence of urban centres. This idea is supported by the fact that the Brahmanical tradition ascribes the foundation of almost all the cities to certain kings. For example, a king called Kusamba is said to have founded Kausambi. Similarly, Hastin founded Hastinapura and Sravasta founded Sravasti. In Buddhist literature cities are associated with sages, plants and animals. For example, Kapilavastu is said to have been named after the sage, Kapila, and Kausambi was named after the Kusamba trees growing in that region. However, the tradition of cities being founded by kings is quite strong. The Pandavas are said to have founded Indraprastha. In the Ramayana also princes of the ruling family are supposed to have founded various cities.

Some of the political centres also became great commercial centres in the subsequent period. Soon, centres which were important for both the political and commercial reasons overshadowed those which were only political centres. For example, capital cities like Hastinapura never experienced the kind of prosperity that we associate with Kasi or Kausambi. Once long distance trade prospered, political leaders tried to enrich their treasuries by taxing traders. At least in two cases political capitals were relocated in areas connected with important trade-routes. The capital of Kosala was shifted from Ayodhya to Sravasti and the capital of Magadha was shifted from Rajagriha to Pataliputra. This indicates the importance of emerging trading networks with an important section of the ancient **uttarapatha** stretching along the Himalayan foothills and finally connecting Taxila with Rajagriha. Similarly, Pataliputra was located at a point where it could exploit the trade route passing through the river Ganges. It was the patronage of kings and merchants that led to the development of cities in ancient India. The literature of this period is full of descriptions of caravans of merchants going to distant areas to conduct trade. Rich merchants along with princes are described as the main supporters of the Buddha.

15.4.2 The Image of City in Ancient India

The following reconstruction is based on references in the Buddhist and Brahmanical literature of slightly later period. Books like the **Divyavadana** and **Apastambr Dharma-sutra** provide us with an idea of the city in those times. Ancient Indian literature gives an idealised view of cities. Ayodhya described in **Ramayana** or Vaisali described in the Buddhist texts would be almost identical if one goes by their description. Ideally the cities

craftsmen. The cities were surrounded by defensive walls and moats. Wide streets, high mansions with colourful banners, busy markets, flowering gardens, ponds filled with lotus and geese are part of this description. Well dressed men, beautiful women dancing and singing complete the picture of the city. This timeless description of an idealised city gives us an unsatisfactory idea of what ancient Indian cities actually looked like. Other incidental references may help us get a better view of the cities.

15.4.3 A Walk through the City

Towns seem to have grown around the intersection of two highways or along river banks. When you entered the city streets, what would you see? Well, the contemporary literary sources give a vivid description in this regard. The haze of dust raised by horses hoofs and caravans of merchants which the pious Brahmins disliked so much. The crowds of people clamouring around shops selling various kinds of eatables such as fruits like mangoes, jack-fruits and bananas or sugar candy, cooked rice, etc. The din and bustle created by women selling trinkets and bangles of conch shell and by flower sellers filled the air. If one had taste for liquor, shops selling various kinds of them would be found. The houses were generally made of earth or timber with tiled roofing—the kind of houses still visible in the countryside of the Gangetic plains. In some cases the houses might be made of stone or burnt brick. One could see women looking down from their balconies. Sometimes one might come across a prostitute. If you were fond of gambling, there were arrangements for that too. On the roads you could also come across the processions of the king and his retinue seated on their elephants and chariots. In some parts of the city you could see the king's army men practising archery, training elephants and improving their skills of warfare. The other kind of procession you were likely to encounter was that of the wandering mendicants clad in brown or white robes, sometimes not wearing anything at all. These wandering ascetics belonging to the various sects that emerged in this period could be seen lecturing on various religious problems, in the groves and gardens given to them. The audiences could be varied. Sometimes it was the exclusive assembly of the rich merchants or powerful princes, at other times it could be groups of people who came from the poorest sections of society. The rich lavished their wealth upon these monks. Gardens and monasteries meant for the exclusive use of monks were also a part of the urban landscape.

15.4.4 Items of Exchange

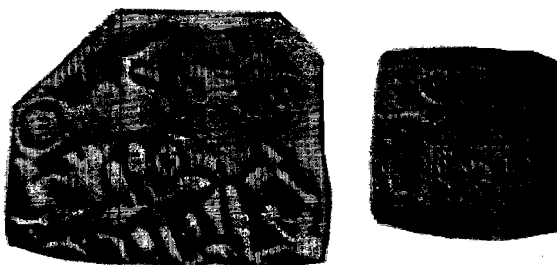
Markets involved the buying and selling of commodities. People could be seen buying utensils and tools made of metals like iron, copper, tin and silver. Groups of merchants specialising in the procurement and selling of salt could be seen in the streets earmarked for them. The cotton cloth of Kasi attracted quite a large numbers of buyers. Woollen blankets brought from the distant north-western province of Gandhara could attract only the rich. Horses brought from Sind and Kamboja would also be on sale. Here the buyers were only the super-rich of those days. Bangles of conch shell, beautiful ornaments of gold and combs and ornaments made of ivory and various kinds of precious stones were also in high demand among the aristocracy.

Literary sources also point out that each item was sold in a separate street. Those who manufactured or brought them also sold them. There were no shops selling a variety of items. There were various kinds of traders: the shopkeepers (*apanika*), retailers (*Kraya-Vikrayika*) and the money investors (*Setthi-Gahapati*). At least the richer people were using coins. The coin of highest value was the silver *satamana*. This was followed by the *Karsapana*. The copper *masas* and *kakani* were coins of smaller denomination. Amidst this glitter of the cities was hidden a whole category of poor people who went unnoticed. In a Buddhist story it is said that the daughter of a merchant on seeing a *chandala* (i.e. of the outcaste categories) washed her eyes for fear of pollution. With the emergence of cities a class of washermen, scavengers, beggars and sweepers also came into existence. The services of sweepers, and the people involved in cremating corpses were essential for cities. However, these people were the most impoverished and deprived sections of society. These outcastes had to stay on the fringes of the city with no hopes of economic or social improvement in their condition. The group of beggars also emerged as a result of the breakdown of kin-based society and increasing demands on the produce by the rulers. There is a story which says that the king's men looted the village in day time and the robbers at night.

15.5 THE CITY IN ARCHAEOLOGY

The literary sources available to us have undergone several alterations and additions in the subsequent periods. The written manuscripts of these texts which are available to us are less than a thousand years old. Thus, it is difficult to sift out the material of the later phases of history from the early phases of history. As such the information derived from excavation reports gives us a more dependable idea regarding the cities of the period. This is because the archaeological data can be dated with greater certainty. Also, the literary sources exaggerate the opulence and splendour of the cities. The excavated material does not have such a bias. Let us see what kind of information is provided by excavation reports.

By about 700 B.C. in places like Ayodhya, Kausambi and Sravasti small settlements came into existence. The people living in these settlements used various kinds of potteries. Among them a particular kind of pottery called the Painted Grey Ware is important because many people living in the upper Gangetic Valley were also using this pottery. People in other settlements of the middle Gangetic Valley were using a pottery called the Black and Red Ware. By about the sixth century B.C. people of this entire zone started using along with other varieties of pottery, a particular kind of pottery having glossy surface. This pottery is called the Northern Black Polished ware. This deluxe pottery is one of the indicators of the broad cultural uniformity in the Gangetic Valley towns of the sixth century B.C. Probably this pottery was made in a few places and exported over large areas by merchants. Another item which starts appearing at the archaeological sites at this phase is coins. Coins came into use in this period for the first time in ancient India. The coins are made of silver and copper and are commonly those which are called Punchmarked coins. They bear various kinds of symbols on one side and were probably initially issued by merchants. The introduction of coinage promoted organised commerce. In addition, copper cast irons which, like Punchmarked coins did not have any writings on them, appear in this phase at some sites.



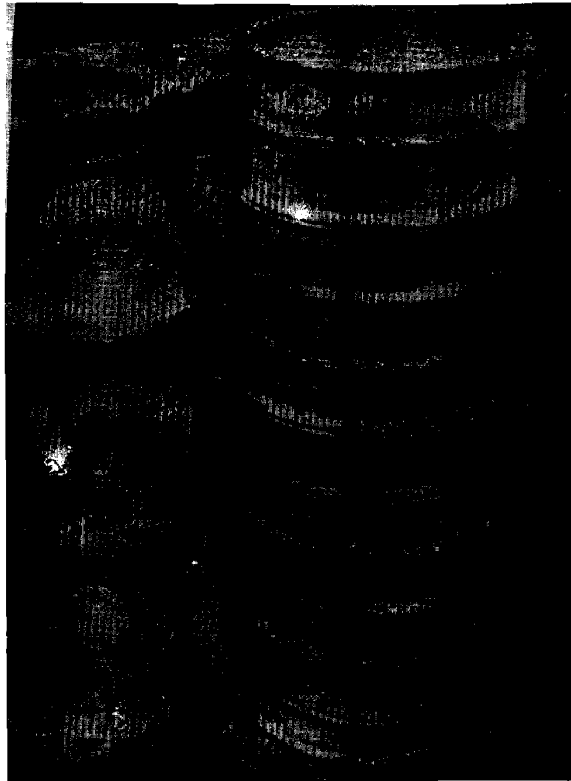
4. Punch Marked Coins

The barter system requires two persons willing to exchange their produce. Suppose a person has a cow which he wants to exchange for hay. There is a person who has hay but he wants to exchange it for rice. In that case barter cannot take place. Coins on the other hand carry standard values for buying and selling. Besides it is easier to carry coins than to carry cows for buying something. The introduction of money also led to the emergence of the class of money-lenders.

The larger settlements in this period show the use of baked bricks for housing. Soak Pits made from superimposed Jars or rings of terracotta used for the disposal of dirty water have also been reported. They indicate some kind of planning. In the preceding phase people lived in mud brick hutments. There is also evidence of a larger number of settlements of larger size. This would indicate a higher density of population. In some sites drains and refuse bins have been reported. However, the excavated materials indicate that many details regarding cities given in literature are either highly exaggerated or that they belong to a later period. None of the cities of the sixth century B.C. show evidence of a planned layout, whereas literary works always talk about planned layouts of cities. Large scale excavations in the ancient site of Taxila show that this town might have come into existence by 8th-7th century B.C. However, planned township came into existence only around the 2nd century B.C. Similarly, literature repeatedly mentions that cities like Ayodhya and Vaisali covered anywhere between 30 to 50 square kilometres. The excavations indicate that none of these cities would exceed 4 to 5 square kilometre. Likewise the descriptions of large palaces and wide streets seem to be exaggerated. So far except in Kausambi no palatial structure has been reported in the 6th century B.C. The houses were more like humble hutments. No monumental buildings are in evidence. Many early cities like Ujjain, Kausambi, Rajagriha,

etc. show evidences of fortification. Fortifications are indicative of increased apprehension of warfare. Also fortifications are a way in which the urban community is demarcated from the rest of the population. This population could be easily controlled by the king. This also supports the literary evidence that Pura meaning fortified settlement were the earliest forms of urban settlement in ancient India.

It is now believed that prosperous cities with large palaces came into existence during the Mauryan period. The literature available to us seems to have used Mauryan cities as the standard description for the cities of the preceding period too.



5. Soaked Pits found in Ancient Cities

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write ten lines on the kind of cities which are referred to in the contemporary literatures.

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- 2) What do the archaeological source tell about the cities? Write in ten lines.

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3) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×)

- i) There was a tradition of cities being named after the name of the kings as well as trees.
- ii) We do not get an accurate picture of the cities from the Ancient Texts.
- iii) With the coming of the cities the groups of beggars, sweepers and other impoverished sections completely disappeared.
- iv) The introduction of coins made the barter system redundant and facilitated organised commerce.

15.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you learnt about the emergence of urban centres in the sixth century B.C. Emergence of the city was a result of two crucial processes. One was in relationship with nature i.e. by the use of iron and mastering the technique of paddy transplantation the people of the Gangetic Valley achieved greater mastery over the process of agricultural production. The other process was the changes in the internal structure of the sixth century B.C. society. This meant that the ruling castes like the Kshatriyas and Brahmanas along with the class of the **Gahapatis** could extract surplus food and other social products. The place where the rich and powerful lived was called the city. Of course the presence of these people meant the presence of a large number of poor people. That is why some scholars have said that the emergence of Buddhism was a response to urban misery. The ancient Indian literature describes cities of various kinds like **Pura**, **Pattana** and **Nagara**. However, literature seems to exaggerate the size and opulence of the cities. This was found out by the archaeologists who excavated the ancient sites of these cities.

15.7 KEY WORDS

Hinterland: region lying inside the area of influence of a town.

Literate tradition: refers to traditions in which writing was known.

Paddy transplantation: the practice of removing the seedling where it has grown and planting it in another place.

State Society: society characterised by the presence of rulers and ruled, rich and poor.

Surplus: refers to the produce which is siphoned off by the rulers from the producers.

Taxation: contribution exacted by the rulers from individuals or groups on a regular basis.

Tribute: an irregular payment in acknowledgment of subjection.

Wet Rice Cultivation : The practice of cultivation in which paddy seedlings are transplanted into fields which are water-logged. This is distinct from the dry rice cultivation in which seeds are simply broadcast in the fields. Wet rice cultivation is immensely more productive.

15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) C
- 2) (i) × (ii) ✓ (iii) × (iv) ✓
- 3) In your answer, you should refer to the following points: a dominant non-agricultural population; functioning in an advantageous relationship with a large hinterland; centre for governing religious, administrative and economic activity; greater differentiation in wealth and status and the existence of a centralised administrative agency. See Section 15.2.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) In your answer you should explain various terms (like Pura, Durga, Nigama, Nagara) used in the literature and point out their differences. See Sub-sec. 15.4.1
- 2) You should refer to the use of a new kind of pottery (NBP Ware), introduction of coins, and the use of baked bricks for housing. Also point out how an extremely exaggerated picture given by the literary sources has been corrected by archaeology. See Section 15.5.
- 3) (i) ✓ (ii) ✓ (iii) × (iv) ✓

UNIT 16 SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Our Sources of Information
- 16.3 Society
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16.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will get to know in general about the main social and economic changes which crystallised by the period of second urbanization and specially about the :

- main segments of the society, social order and the disabilities imposed on the sudras,
- evidences and the causative factors for the growth of food producing economy,
- main features of rural and urban economy, and
- main crafts and occupations along with the nature of trade and trade routes during the period.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we discuss in any details the major aspects of society and economy in the period between the 6th century B.C. and 4th century B.C., it is necessary, as an introduction, to recapitulate some of the points already discussed. First, the later Vedic society seems to reflect a shift to a new geographical region i.e., upper and middle Ganga Valley, as well as consolidation of agrarian economy. Second, the appearance of rulers and others who enjoyed shares of wealth produced by society without producing any wealth themselves, and institutionalized inequality in society. This institutionalization of inequality meant the emergence of State and the state apparatus. It also meant further consolidation of the theory of the division of society into four varnas, because the varna theory elaborated the ways in which different sections in society should perform their duties.

16.2 OUR SOURCES OF INFORMATION

We have a variety of texts which provide us with information about the society and economy of the 6th to 4th century B.C. period. There are many brahmanical texts meant to instruct people in the performance of day-to-day rites and rituals. They are called **Grihya-sutras**, **Srautsutras** and **Dharma sutras**. Among these manuals some texts like those of Apastamba belong to this period. The grammar of Panini provides brief references to many communities in those times. However, our primary source of information about this period are the various Buddhist texts. Written in the pali language, the early Buddhist canons' date

back to the period between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C. Our information about the contemporary society is also enriched by the study of the archaeological sites related to the Northern Black Polished Ware.

16.3 SOCIETY

The society of the sixth to fourth century B.C. is a society undergoing tremendous change. Preachers, princess and merchants vie for our attention. This was the time when cities came into existence for the first time in historical India. (You have read about it in unit 15). This was also the time when a literate tradition began. Towards the end of this period the society had acquired the knowledge of writing and the earliest script of ancient India is called the Brahmi script. The invention of writing expanded the horizon of knowledge. Socially acquired knowledge had been transmitted through memorisation from one generation to another. There was a possibility of lots of things being forgotten or changed over a period of time. The invention of writing meant that knowledge could be stored without tampering with it. This fact heightened the consciousness of change. This was because social structure and beliefs kept changing in time. Once things were written down those changes became observable to the people of the subsequent period when ideas and beliefs had changed. Let us discuss about the various sections of society who are caught in the flux of change.

16.3.1 Kshatriyas

The Kshatriyas appear to be the most visible and powerful section of society in the contemporary literature. Buddha and Mahavira belonged to this group. In the Brahmanical texts the Kshatriyas have been equated with the warrior caste. This is the second highest caste in the varna order. They were supposed to be the rulers of the society. However, the Buddhist literature gives a different picture of the Kshatriyas. They did not have the compactness and strict rules of marriage which characterise a caste. They are mentioned as the ruling lineages of the **Ganasamghas** like those of Vaisali and Kapilavastu, referred to as the Shakyas, Licchavis, Mallas etc. They were groups who owned land collectively. Their land was cultivated by slaves and labourers called the **Dasa**, **Karmakaras**. They do not seem to have performed the Brahmanical rituals. As such we find that the Buddhist literature generally talks of only two groups in the **Ganasamghas**. They are the high caste and the low caste. In these areas instead of the four-fold Brahmanical caste structure there is a two-fold division. The Brahmins and Shudras are missing. These Kshatriya clans practiced various kinds of marriage customs which included the cross-cousin marriage. In fact they were so particular about whom to marry and not to marry that the Shakyas are supposed to have been destroyed because of this. According to a story their overlord, the King of Kosala called Prasenajita, wanted to marry a Shakya girl. The Shakyas could not refuse the offer. So, they sent a Shakya slave girl who was married to the King. The progeny of this marriage succeeded to the throne. Upon discovering this ruse played by the Shakyas, he destroyed them in anger. Although both, the Kosalan monarch and the Shakyas were Kshatriyas they did not inter-marry. This indicates that the Kshatriyas were not a caste in the sense we understand it. The Kshatriyas were very proud of their lineage and status. The Shakyas, Licchavis, Mallas and other such clans jealously guarded their rights of entry in their assemblies and other people were not allowed into these places. These assemblies decided most of the socio-political issues of their society. They did not pay land taxes and they did not have a standing army. In times of war the entire lineage would take to arms.

In the Kingdoms of Kosala, Kashi etc. the rulers are referred to as Kshatriyas. However unlike the Brahmanical sources the Buddhist sources place them at the top of the four caste structure. In one of the discourses Buddha says 'even when a Kshatriya has fallen into the lowest depths, he is still the best and the Brahmins are low in comparison to him.' Some of the Kshatriyas are shown as learned teachers and thinkers. Some others are described as taking to trade. As such one can say that the Brahmanical notion of Kshatriya as the warrior caste was applicable to only some princely families in the upper and middle Gangetic plains. They performed a variety of activities like preaching, trading and supervising agriculture. Especially in eastern India Kshatriyas did not exist as a caste. Rather there were many separate groups who called themselves Kshatriyas.

16.3.2 Brahmanas

The Brahmanas mentioned in the contemporary texts seem more like a caste group. Brahman is one who is born a Brahman. He may change his profession, still he remains a Brahman. The Brahmanical texts give them the privilege of mediation between man and god. They had the exclusive rights of performing sacrifices. This group was imbued with a consciousness of being the highest caste. They also seem to have followed certain rules of avoiding impure food and habitations. The Shatapatha Brahmana a contemporary Brahmanical text mentions four important marks of a Brahmana. They are Brahmanical parentage, suitable behaviour, attainment of fame and teaching of men. For doing this they were supposed to enjoy certain privileges. They were to be respected, given presents, and were given immunity from death sentence. Many Brahmanas did follow the life of renouncement and teaching. The Buddhist literature is generally critical of the Brahmanas. However, it is critical of the Brahmanas who had deviated from pious ethical life. They criticised the excessive ritualism and greediness of the Brahmanas. Many Brahmanas embraced Buddhism. It had been found that among the early followers of the Buddha Brahmanas were present in largest number. However, the Pali literature also indicates that the Brahmanas had taken to various kinds of professions. In the Dasabrahmana Jataka we are told a story which will give us an idea of the Buddhist attitude towards the Brahmanas. "In ancient times there reigned in the city of Indpatta in the Kingdom of Kuru, King Koravya of the family of Yuddhitthila: He was advised by his minister Vidhura in worldly and spiritual things...He (the King) gave him a seat and asked his advice. "Seek Brahmanas, Vidhura, that are virtuous and learned, who eschewing sensual pleasures would enjoy my gifts, gifts, O friend, we will make where, what is given will bear rich fruit."

"Very difficult to find are Brahmanas, O King, that are virtuous and learned, who, eschewing sensual pleasures, would enjoy your gifts.

"Verily, there are ten classes of Brahmanas, O King. Here when I distinguish and classify them clearly: Provided with roots, they gather herbs, bathe and mutter aphorisma. Physicians they resemble, O King, even if they call themselves Brahmanas, they are now known to you, O great King, to such we will go."

"Strayed-have they" replies King Koravya".....

"Little bells they carry before you and ring, messages also they carry and they know how to drive wagons, servants they resemble".....

"Carrying a waterpot and a bent stick they run behind the Kings into the villages and the Country towns, saying 'If nothing is given, we will not leave the village or the forests'. Tax Collectors they resemble".....

"With long nails and hair on the body, filthy teeth, filthy hair, covered with dust and dirt, they go out as beggars. Wood-cutters they resemble".....

"Myrobalans, mango and jack fruits, baskets made of sugar, scents, honey and ointment, the most diverse wares they sell, O Lord. Tradesmen they resemble.".....

"Agriculture and trade they carry on, they breed goats and sheep, their daughters they give away (for money), marriages they arrange for their daughters and sons. The Ambattha and versa they resemble".....

"Some purohitas eat food brought from outside, many people ask them (regarding omens), animals they castrate and lucky signs they prepare. Sheep are also slaughtered there (in the houses of the purohitas), as also buffaloes, swine and goats; slaughterer, they resemble.".....

"Armed with the sword and the shield axe in hand, they stand in the roads of the varsas (i.e., in the business streets) lead the caravans. (Through roads exposed to robbers). Cowherds they resemble and nishadas".....

"Building huts in the forest, they make nooses; hares, cats, lizards, fish and tortoises they kill. Hunters are they".....

"Others lie for love of money under the bed of kings; the latter bathe over them after a Soma offering is ready. Bathers they resemble".....

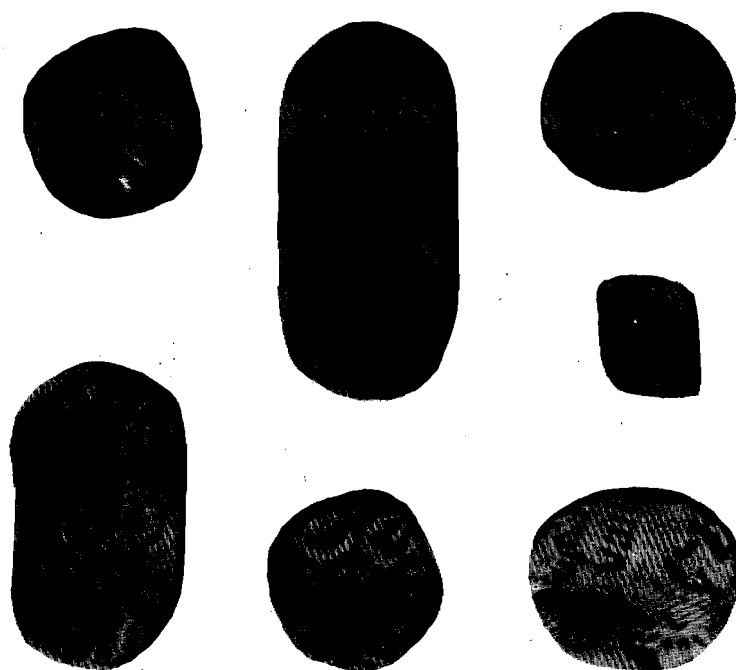
(The names of persons and places as given in the original text have been retained)

This story gives us an idea of the variety of activities performed by the Brahmanas. It also gives us a glimpse of the range of professions present in the contemporary society. Even with the changes in profession they are considered unworthy Brahmanas. They do not lose their caste. References to learned Brahmanas are also legion. So are the references to Brahman agriculturists who cultivated their own land or got their land cultivated by slaves and servants. However, their primary identity as a caste concerned with the divine, had already been formed.

16.3.3 Vaishyas and the Gahapati

In the Brahmanical varna system Vaishya was the third caste in the ritual order. They were entrusted with cattle herding, agriculture and trade. The Buddhist literature on the other hand uses the term **Gahapati** more frequently. **Gahapati** literally means the master of the household. This community of landholders, cultivated its land with the family labour or the labour of slaves and servants. They seem to have emerged out of the **rajanya** and groups mentioned in the Vedic literature. Their emergence represents the emergence of family and individual ownership of wealth. Earlier wealth was collectively owned by the entire lineage. Apart from the **Gahapatis** the Buddhist literature mentions a whole range of professionals and merchants who would fall under the category of the Vaishyas of the Brahmanical texts. Each of them were closed kinship groups who would not inter-marry. Their identity was defined by the kind of professions they followed and by their geographical location. As such there never was a Vaishya caste in the Brahmanical sense of the term. Rather there were many groups having caste like formations. Let us look at some of these groups.

As already mentioned the **Gahapatis** form a prominent category of landowners. Interestingly enough they are rarely found in the **Ganasamghas** where land was owned by Kshatriya lineages. They are frequently mentioned in the monarchies of the middle Gangetic Valley. They were the primary exploiters of agriculture and the source of revenue for the Kings. **Gahapatis** included men of wealth who were also associated with carpentry, medicine etc. The Pali texts use another term **Kutumbika** in a synonymous sense which would mean the head of the household (**Kutumba**). They are shown as rich landowners, dealing in corn or money transactions.



6. Coins from 6th Century B.C.

It was from the class of rich landowners that a section of rich traders evolved. The **Gahapatis** are mentioned in trading towns too. Individual ownership of wealth and weak Brahmanical influence helped the **Gahapatis** use their wealth for trade. In the Western Gangetic Valley this wealth would have been used for sacrifices. Thus, out of this branching

off, emerges the class of **Setthi**. The word **Setthi** literally means 'a person having the best!'. The **Setthi-Gahapati** referred to very rich merchants and bankers having close contacts with the king. **Anathapindika** who donated the **Jetavana** in Sravasti to Buddha was one such rich **Setthi**. A **Setthi** in Benaras engages in trade and drives a caravan of five hundred wagons. Their profession as bankers flourished with the invention of coined money. Coins called **Shatamana**, **Karshapana**, etc. are mentioned in the contemporary literature. Excavations have also shown that coins had come in use by this period. Long distance trade is frequently mentioned.

Apart from the big merchants and landlords many small scale traders are also mentioned. Among them shopkeeper, retailer, trader, pedlars, selling pots and pans, carpenters, ivory-carvers, garland makers and smiths can be mentioned. These groups formed professional unions. No one else but a family member could take up that profession. This local division of different kinds of works and the hereditary character of various professions, gave them the character of guilds. They used to have a head who would look after their interests. The King was supposed to respect the internal rules of the guild and protect it. The presence of the guild indicates increased trading and manufacturing activity. It meant that groups identified specifically on the basis of their economic activity came into existence. These groups did have the character of caste. Each of these groups would marry inside the group only and their rules were considered inviolable.

16.3.4 Shudras

The Shudras were the lowest caste in the Brahmanical order. Their only duty was service to the other three castes. The non-brahmanical texts give us a picture of many oppressed and poor people who are bracketed as Shudras. The Pali literature frequently mentions **dasas** (slaves) and **karmakaras** (wage labourers). The term **dalidda** is used for denoting extremely poor people who did not have anything to eat and no covering for their back. So, for the first time we have references to the rich living in luxury, and the poor destitute. The process of such impoverishment and the formation of the Shudra caste may be attributed to the appropriation of land and other resources by the powerful groups. The Shudras without any resources were reduced to servility and forced to work on the land of the rich. The more general reference to the Shudras included artisans and craftsmen also. The **Dharmasutras** ascribe the origins of various groups of the Shudras by the notion of the **Sankirna jati**, which means that if there is an inter-caste marriage, their progeny would be of a very low caste. This was the counterpart in ritual status to the economic and social deprivation of the peasants, slaves and craftsmen. They had the most to lose from the erosion of kinship ties, characterising the Vedic society.

Dasasudda is frequently mentioned in the contemporary literature. They were slaves who did not have any legal status. War-prisoners and people who could not pay back their debts seemed to be the chief sources of supply of the Shudra labour. They were forced to work on the land of the rich. The **dasas**, **karmakaras** and **kassakas** were the sources of labour supply in rural areas. With the emergence of cities the inequality between the rich and poor further increased.

All the groups mentioned above by no means exhaust the list of social categories present in the time of the Buddha. Wandering dancers and musicians moved from village to village and impressed their audiences with their skills. Tricksters, tramps, elephant tamers, stage managers, soldiers, writers, archers, hunters and barbers were some of the groups which come in our view. It is difficult to place them in the caste order. Probably, they would be considered out-castes. Most of them were outside the pale of the newly emerged agrarian society. As such they were generally despised. Sometimes these groups rose in revolt. The **Jataka** stories are full of descriptions of war. The poor Shudras are mentioned as living outside the city. The logical outcome of this process was the emergence of untouchability. The **candalas** are described as living in separate villages. Their presence was believed to be so polluting that the daughter of a **Setthi** washes her eyes on seeing a **candala**. Similarly, a Brahmana is disturbed about the fact that a breeze blowing past a **candala** would touch him. The **candalas** were supposed to wear the garments of the dead and eat their food out of broken pots. Other such despised groups were the **Pukkusas**, **Nishadas** and **Venas**. One of the justifications of the King's rule was that they protected the villages from the plundering, pillaging tribes. These were the primitive communities who were gradually evicted from their homes in the forests. They either became slaves or robbers. There are references to

16.3.5 Wandering Ascetics

One very visible group in this period was of the **Paribrajakas** and **Sramanas**. These were people who had renounced their homes. They travelled from place to place and held discussions on the meaning of life, society and spirituality. Among them were people like the Buddha and Mahavira.

16.3.6 Condition of Women

The changes in the economy and society of the sixth century B.C. also affected the condition of women. Since, property was inherited from father to son, there was obsession with the need to prevent adultery. The books repeatedly say that the two most important functions of the King are punishing the violation of property and of the family. The meek slave like wife was considered the ideal wife. However, this was true of the wives of the rich. For them the main function of a wife was producing legitimate heirs. However, there were a larger number of women who spent their lives labouring for their masters and mistresses. Women were looked down in comparison to men. They were described as incapable of sitting in a public assembly. They were permanently in the charge of men-father, brother or son. Even if they join the **Samgha** they were treated as inferior to men.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What kinds of conclusion can you draw from the story of the **Dasabrahmana Jataka**?
Answer in about 5 lines.

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- 2) What are the dissimilarities between the **Kshatriyas** and the **Brahmanas**.

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- 3) Account for the deteriorating condition of the **Shudras**.

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16.4 ECONOMY

We have seen that the process of state formation and social stratification gathered momentum and assumed significance in the middle of the first millennium B.C. The two phenomena which were closely interlinked, appeared because the new agriculture could not only sustain agriculturists but also many others who were not engaged directly in this vital task of primary production. Literary and archaeological sources, which reflect the economic pattern of the country during sixth, fifth century B.C., contain evidence of the enhanced production of agricultural wealth: (Sources of these have been noted earlier Unit 14)

Besides :

- 1) The growth of monastic orders living exclusively on alms and donations, presupposes enough agricultural produce.
- 2) The establishment of sixteen Mahajanapadas along with their capital cities and standing armies would not have been possible if agricultural produce could not sustain non-agriculturists.
- 3) The location of the capital towns of this period having variety of crafts and trades in river Valleys with broad flood plains and on main trade routes also presupposes some surplus food production.

Let us discuss some of the important aspects of economic life during this period.

16.4.1 Factors in the Growth of Food Producing Economy

Some of the main causative factors which seem to have influenced agricultural growth were as follows:

- 1) The crucial role of iron implements in clearing the thick vegetation cover of the Ganga Plains from about 600 B.C. onwards. Cereals like rice, barley, wheat and millets were produced over the wider areas of land.
- 2) Buddhists insisted on the protection of cattle and **Suttanipata** clearly states that they should not be slaughtered because they constituted a source of grain and strength. Thus the preservation of cattle wealth for agricultural purposes was encouraged.
- 3) What further distinguishes the force of production in the age of Buddha from those in later Vedic times is the beginning of paddy transplantation.
- 4) The rice producing economy was supplemented by domestication and hunting of animals. This was another major means of their economic life and the source of livelihood. Archaeologists have recovered large number of bones of cattle, sheep, goat, horses and pigs from the number of archaeological sites. Thus, the animals were not only used for draught and the plough of fields but a section of the society was also probably non-vegetarian.



7. Agricultural Implements

16.4.2 Rural Economy

As a rich agricultural hinterland was cultivated, trade too received an impetus. The transition was being made from a subsistence economy to a market economy. The introduction of coinage facilitated this development. It led to greater mobility, accelerated trade and commerce and facilitated intercourse over a vast area which resulted in the growth of a complex rural and urban economic system.

That the village centres had their own economic pattern is revealed from a number of literary sources belonging to our period of study. It was based on a system of village communities of peasant proprietorship. The Pali texts speak of three types of villages:

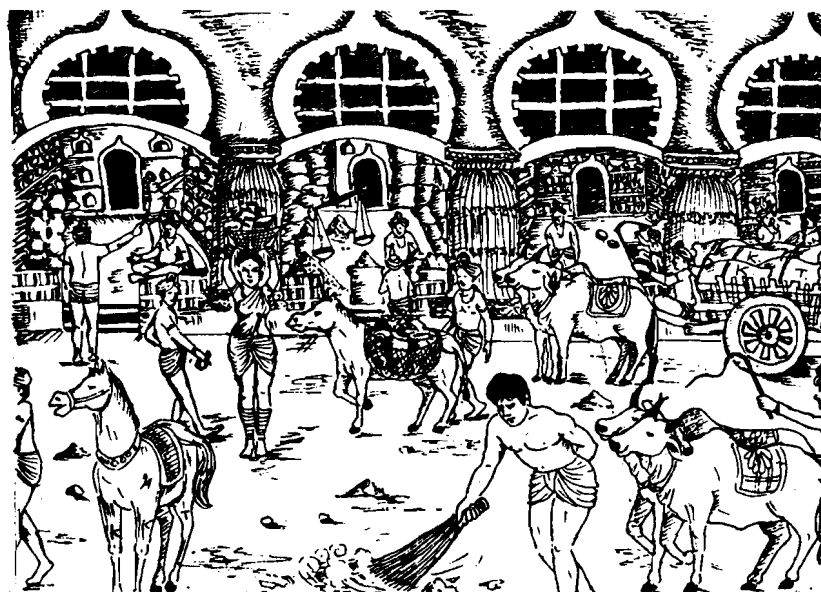
- 1) the typical village inhabited by various castes and communities.
- 2) suburban villages were in the nature of craft villages. These served as markets for other villages and linked the town with countryside.
- 3) border villages consisting of hunters, fowlers etc., who were leading a simple life.

The rural economy developed through the establishment of new settlements by shifting surplus population from the overpopulated areas, and also by rehabilitating the decaying villages. In such cases cattle, seed, money and irrigational facilities were given by rulers. Remission of taxes and other concessions were allowed. Retired officials and priests were granted lands in such area. Lands in these areas could not be sold, mortgaged or inherited. Grassland was owned in common. They had an independent internal economy. The chief occupation in the rural area remained to be agriculture. The village supplied surplus produce to the towns and the towns supplied other necessities to the villagers.

Whereas agriculture was the main occupation cattle rearing and certain small crafts connected with land, forest and animals catering to local requirements, were the other features of the rural economy.

16.4.3 Urban Economy

The urban economy was dominated by traders and craftsmen who produced goods for a wider market on a larger scale. The necessary concomitants for the growth of urban economy were surplus food production, crafts specialization, trade, centres of exchange, use of metallic money, political organisation ensuring order and a literate society. The urban economy revolved round two important features—Firstly, industry with a larger number of professionals and craftsmen. Secondly, trade—both internal and external. We will discuss each factor one by one.



8. An Artists' Impression of a City Market

16.4.4 Urban Occupations

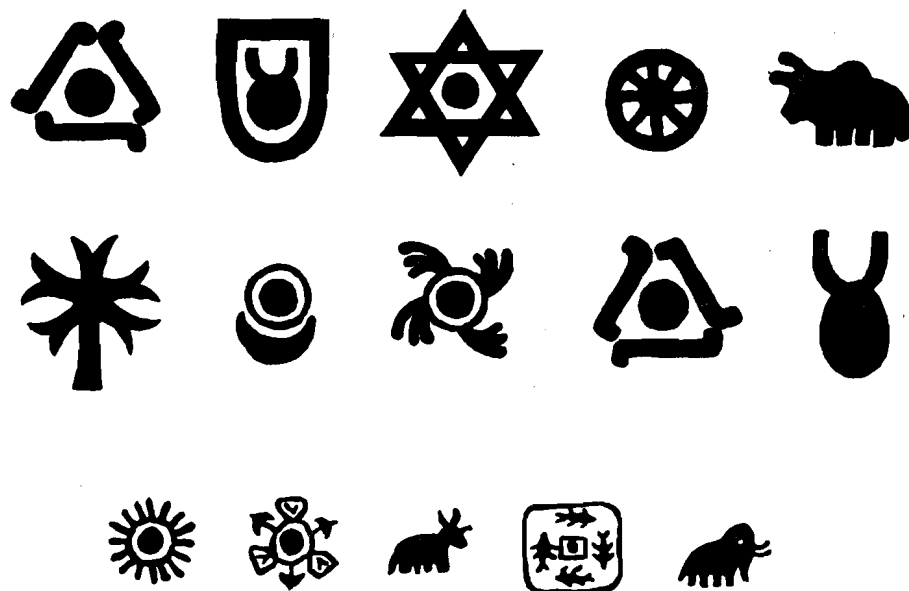
The urban occupations can be broadly categorised into two groups i.e. those connected with productive activities and those which had nothing to do with production as such. The second group which was mainly composed of administrative officials had hardly any direct impact on the urban economy. The merchants, however, who belonged to this category were an intermediary group playing a vital role in the system of distribution. The material remains discovered from the various archaeological sites of northern India such as pottery (particularly NBP); terracotta animal and human figurines; terracotta objects of games and amusement; objects of bone and ivory; coins; stone and glass objects; beads; copper and iron objects; etc., attest to the existence of various important crafts industries which can be classified under the following heads :

- 1) clay working like pottery, terracotta figurines, modelling and to some extent also brick-making etc.
- 2) carpentry and wood-working
- 3) metal-working
- 4) stone-working
- 5) glass industry
- 6) bone and ivory-working
- 7) other miscellaneous industries like garland-makers, makers of bows and arrows, comb, baskets, perfume, liquor oil and musical instruments.

16.4.5 Trade and Trade Routes

Linked with the growth of specialisation of crafts is the development of trade. In those days trade, both inland and foreign, was fairly brisk. Merchants made fortunes by dealing in articles like silks, muslin, armour, perfumes, ivory, ivory works and jewellery etc. They travelled long distances up and down the great rivers of the country, and even undertook coastal voyages to Burma and Sri Lanka from Tamluk in the east and from Broach in the west. Inland, the traders followed certain well established routes. One of them ran from Sravasti to Pratisthana; another linked Sravasti with Rajagriha; a third skirted along the base of the Himalayas from Taxila to Srāvasti; and a fourth connected Kashi with the ports of western coast. Long distance trade was, however, centred in the towns rather than at rural sites because the former were centres of production and consequently of distribution besides being better protected.

The age of barter was almost drawing to a close. Now the ordinary medium of exchange was a coin called **Kahapana** (**Karsapana**). It was of copper and silver and marks were punched on it by merchants or ruler's guilds, guaranteeing its standard. Banks were unknown, and surplus money was either converted into ornaments, or hoarded in jars and buried in the ground, or put in the custody of a friend.



9. Marks on Punched Marked Coins

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What were the main factors which influenced agricultural growth?

- 2) How did rural economy develop?

- 3) What were the important trade routes during the period under review?

16.5 LET US SUM UP

In our study, a good portion of what is said about the social and economic condition of India is based on the early Pali texts and archaeology of the NBPW phase. The process of state formation and social stratification gathered momentum and assumed significance in the middle of the first millennium B.C. Renewed emphasis was given to the four different roles that the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras were called upon to. The nature of the later Vedic society/ PGW culture in which only the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas played the important role got disturbed due to the rise of a trading class, the Vaishyas, whose strength emerged from the money earned. All kinds of restrictions were imposed on the Shudras. The food producing economy was immensely strengthened by the use of iron implements, transplantation of paddy, and by religious sanction for the preservation of cattle. The transition was from the subsistence economy to market economy. Trade and the system of coinage also played its role in the development of urban economy. Whereas agriculture, cattle rearing and certain small crafts connected with land, forest and animals were the chief features of rural economy, urban economy was dominated by a large number of professionals and craftsmen who produced for wider circulation and more consumption. This led to greater mobility, increased trade and trade routes and resulted in the growth of a complicated rural and urban economic system.

16.6 KEY WORDS

PGW: the abbreviation stands for the Painted Grey Ware. This pottery was grey in colour and painted with black pigment in several designs.

NBP: the abbreviation stands for the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) which was a very glossy, shining type of pottery found in a variety of colours.

Subsistence: means of supporting life.

Kinship: relationship by birth or marriage.

Mortgage: give a money-lender a claim on (Property) as a security for money borrowed.

Progeny : Son/daughter.

16.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-sec. 16.3.2. Your answer could indicate that the Jataka reflects the flexibility in the choice of professions of Brahmanas and varieties of professions the Brahmanas were engaged in.
- 2) See Sub-sec. 16.3.1. Your answer could include the different roles assigned to the two groups by the literature of the period. Also focus on different functions they performed.
- 3) See Sub-sec. 16.3.4. Your answer could indicate how appropriation of land by more powerful groups, chronic indebtedness, lack of legal status and origin, notion of purity (of upper caste-groups) and pollution(of Shudras) contributed to the deteriorating conditions of Shudras.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-sec. 16.4.1. Your answer could indicate the crucial role of iron in food production, preservation of cattle wealth for agricultural purposes, technique of paddy transplantation as factors contributing to the enhanced agricultural growth.
- 2) See Sub-sec. 16.4.2. Your answer could indicate as to how the rural economy developed through the establishment of new settlements.
- 3) See Sub-sec. 16.4.5. Your answer should indicate the foreign trade routes from Tamluk and Broach to Burma and Sri Lanka. The four inland trade routes from Sravasti to Pratishthana; Sravasti to Rajagriha; Taxila to Sravasti and Kashi to Western Ports should be referred.

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UNIT 17 BUDDHISM, JAINISM AND OTHER RELIGIOUS IDEAS

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17.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit you should be able to know about :

- the background to the rise of new religious ideas during the sixth century B.C.,
- the emergence and growth of Buddhism and Jainism,
- the main tenets of these religions,
- the influence these religions came to wield on contemporary society,
- the other heterodox ideas prevalent in the sixth century B.C., and,
- the significance of these religious movements.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

The sixth century B.C. was an important stage in Indian history as far as the development of new religions is concerned. In this period, we notice a growing opposition to the ritualistic orthodox ideas of the Brahmanas. This ultimately led to the emergence of many heterodox religious movements. Among these Buddhism and Jainism developed into well organised popular religions. This Unit attempts to analyse the emergence and significance of these new religious ideas.

Firstly it deals with the factors that were responsible for the emergence and growth of heterodox ideas. Then it goes on to explain how Buddha and Mahavira tried to find a solution in their own ways to end human suffering. Since the causes for the emergence of these two religions are common in nature, there is some similarity in the principles adopted by these religions. However, they differ completely on some of the basic principles. We have discussed these points in the Unit.

The other heterodox religious ideas which were current during the sixth century B.C. have also been dealt with. Finally we examine the impact of these religious movements on contemporary economy and society.

17.2 RISE OF NEW RELIGIOUS IDEAS

The new religious ideas during this period emerged out of the prevailing social, economic and religious conditions. Let us examine some of the basic reasons which contributed to their emergence:

- i) The Vedic religious practices had become cumbersome, and in the context of the new society of the period had become in many cases meaningless ceremonies. Sacrifices and rituals increased and became more elaborate and expensive. With the breakup of communities, the participation in these practices also became restricted and as such irrelevant to many sections in the society.
- ii) Growing importance of sacrifices and rituals established the domination of the Brahmanas in the society. They acted both as priests and teachers and through their monopoly of performing sacred religious rites, they claimed the highest position in the society which was now divided into four varnas.
- iii) Contemporary economic and political developments, on the other hand, helped the emergence of new social groups which acquired considerable economic power. You have seen that merchants living in cities or even rich agricultural householders possessed considerable wealth. Similarly, the Kshatriyas, whether in the monarchies or in the **gana-samghas**, came to wield much more political power than before. These social groups were opposed to the social positions defined for them by the Brahmanas on the basis of their heredity. As Buddhism and Jainism did not give much importance to the notion of birth for social status, they attracted the Vaisyas to their folds. Similarly, the Kshatriyas i.e. the ruling class were also unhappy with Brahmanical domination. Briefly put, it was basically the discontent generated by the dominant position of the Brahmanas in the society, which contributed to the social support behind the new religious ideas. It is worth remembering that both Buddha and Mahavira came from Kshatriya class but in their search for answers to the pressing problems of society they went beyond boundaries set by their birth. Further, when we try to find out how their ideas were received by their contemporaries, we notice that they had a range of people responding to them: Kings, big merchants, rich householders, Brahmins and even courtesans. They all represented the new society which was emerging in the sixth century B.C. and Buddha and Mahavira, and other thinkers of those times, in their own ways, responded to the problems of a new social order. The Vedic ritualistic practices had ceased to be of much relevance to this new social order.

Buddha and Mahavira, were by no means, the first to criticise the existing religious beliefs. Many religious preachers before them, like Kapila, Makkali Gosala, Ajita Kesakambalin and Pakuda Kachchayana had already highlighted the evils of the Vedic religions. They also developed new ideas on life and God. New philosophies were also being preached. However, it was Buddha and Mahavira, who provided an alternative religious order.

This was the background which helped the emergence and establishment of new religious orders in the sixth century B.C. Among these Buddhism and Jainism were most popular and well organised. We will now discuss the origin and development of Buddhism and Jainism separately.

17.3 GAUTAMA BUDDHA AND ORIGIN OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism was founded by Gautama Buddha who had been given the name Siddhartha by his parents. His father was Suddhodana, the chief of the Sakya clan and mother was Maya, princess of the Koliya clan. He was born in the Lumbini grove (modern Rumindei) in Nepal Tarai. We know this through an inscribed pillar of Asoka. The date of birth of Buddha is a matter of dispute but most of the scholars place it about 566 B.C.

Though, his life was spent in revel and labour, it failed to attract the mind of Gautama. As

traditions describe it, he was deeply affected by the sight of an old man, a sick person, a dead body and an ascetic. The misery of the human life cast a deep spell on Gautama. In order to find a solution to the misery of mankind, he left home at the age of 29.

Gautama spent six years as a wandering ascetic. From a sage named Alara Kalama he learned the technique of meditation and the teachings of the **upanishadas**. Since these teachings did not lead Gautama to the final liberation, he left him with five Brahmana ascetics.



10. The Birth of Buddha

He practised rigid austerities and resorted to different kinds of self torture to find the truth. Ultimately abandoning this he went to Uruvela (near, modern Bodh Gaya on the banks of Niranjana river) and sat under a pipal tree (Bodhi tree). Here he attained the supreme knowledge (Enlightenment) on the 49th day of his continuous meditation. Since then he was called the Buddha (the enlightened one). From here he proceeded to the Deer park at Sarnath near Varanasi and gave his first sermon which is known as '**Dharmachakra Pravartana**' (setting in motion the wheel of Dharma).

Asvajit, Upali, Mogallana, Sari-putra and Anada were the first five disciples of Buddha. Buddha laid the foundations of the Buddhist Sangha. He preached most of his sermons at Sravasti. Anathapindika, the rich merchant of Sravasti became his follower and made liberal donations to the Buddhist order.

Soon he started visiting various places to propagate his sermons. He visited Sarnath,

Mathura, Rajgir, Gaya and Pataliputra. Kings like Bimbisara, Ajatasatru (Magadha), Prasenajita (Kosala) and Udayana (Kausambi) accepted his doctrines and became his disciples. He also visited Kapilavastu and converted his foster mother and his son Rahula to his faith.

At the age of 80 (486 B.C.) he died at Kusinagara (Kasia in Deoria district in Uttar Pradesh), the capital of the Mallas. Let us examine the teachings of Buddha which became popular and gave a new direction to the religious ideas of the time.

17.4 TEACHINGS OF BUDDHA

The basic teachings of Buddha are contained in:

- a) Four Noble Truths, and
- b) Eight Fold Path

The following are the Four Noble Truths:

- i) The world is full of sufferings.
- ii) All sufferings have a cause: desire, ignorance and attachment are the causes of sufferings.
- iii) The suffering could be removed by destroying its cause.
- iv) In order to end sufferings one must know the right path. This path is the Eight Fold Path (Ashtangika Marga).

The Eight Fold Path consists of the following principles:

- i) Finding the right view. It is to understand that the world is filled with sorrow generated by desire. The ending of desire will lead to the liberation of the soul.
- ii) Right aim. It seeks to avoid the enjoyment of the senses and luxury. It aims to love humanity and increase the happiness of others.
- iii) Right speech, which seeks to emphasise the speaking of truth always.
- iv) Right action, which is understood to be unselfish action.
- v) Right livelihood. It instructs that a man should live by honest means.
- vi) Right effort. It is the proper way of controlling one's senses so as to prevent bad thoughts. It is through correct mental exercises that one can destroy desire and attachment.
- vii) Right mindfulness. It is the understanding of the idea that the body is impermanent and meditation is the means for the removal of worldly evils.
- viii) Right concentration. The observation of it will lead to peace. Meditation will unravel the real truth.

Buddhism laid great emphasis on the law of 'karma'. According to this law present is determined by the past actions. The condition of a man in this life and the next depends upon his own actions.

Every individual is the maker of his own destiny. We are born again and again to reap the fruits of our 'karma'. If an individual has no sins, he is not born again. Thus the doctrine of karma is the essential part of the teachings of Buddha.

Buddha preached 'nirvana', the ultimate goal in the life of a man. It means the shedding of all desires, and ending of sufferings, which finally leads to freedom from rebirth. By a process of elimination of desire, one can attain 'nirvana'. Therefore, Buddha preached that annihilation of desire is the real problem. Prayers and sacrifices will not end the desire. So unlike the emphasis on rituals and ceremonies in Vedic religion he laid emphasis on the moral life of an individual.

Buddha neither accepted nor rejected the existence of God. He was more concerned about the individual and his actions. Buddhism also did not believe in the existence of soul.

Besides these Buddha laid stress on certain other aspects:

- Buddha emphasised on the spirit of love. Love could be expressed on all living beings by following 'ahimsa' (non-killing). Though the principle was well understood, it was not emphasised as much as in Jainism.
- An individual should pursue the middle path and both severe asceticism as well as luxurious life are to be avoided.

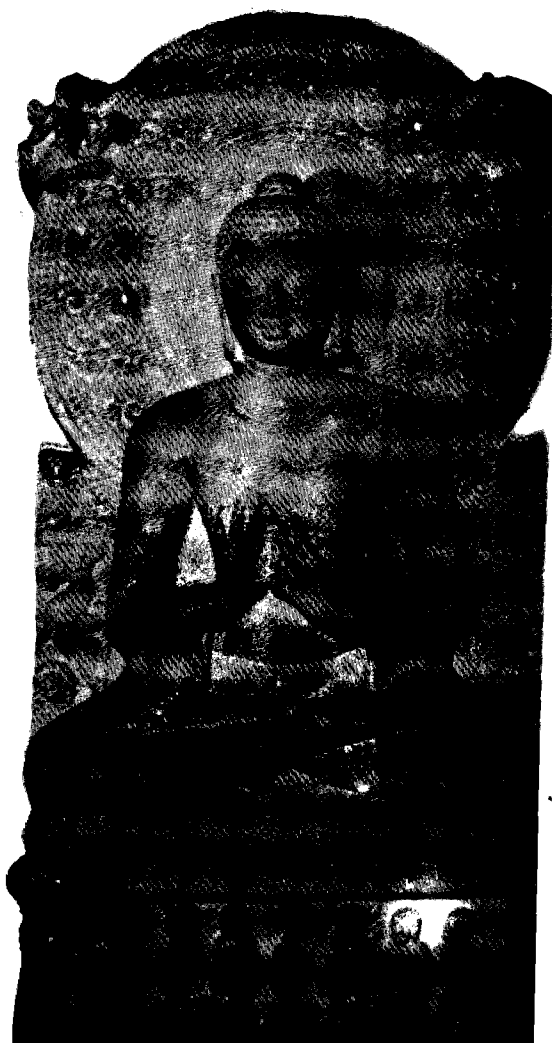
Teachings of Buddha put forward a serious challenge to the existing Brahmanical ideas:

- i) Buddha's liberal and democratic approach quickly attracted the people of all sections. His attack on the caste system and the supremacy of the Brahmins was welcomed by the people of the lower orders. Irrespective of caste and sex people were taken into the Buddhist order. In Buddhism salvation lay in one's good deeds. So there was no need of a priest or middle man to achieve 'nirvana' the ultimate goal of life.
- ii) Buddha rejected the authority of the Vedas and condemned animal sacrifices. He protested against the complicated and meaningless rituals. He said that neither a sacrifice to gods can wash away sin, nor any prayer of any priest do any good to a sinner.

Buddhism in a very short period emerged into an organised religion and Buddha's teachings were codified.

The Buddhist canons (collection of teachings) are divided into three sections namely:

- i) The **Sutta Pitaka** consists of five sections (**nikayas**) of religious discourses and sayings of Buddha. The fifth section contains the Jataka tales (birth stories of Buddha).



11. Preaching Buddha (Gupta Period)

- ii) The **Vinaya Pitaka** contains the rules of monastic discipline.
- iii) The **Abhidhamma Pitaka** contains the philosophical ideas of teachings of Buddha. It is written in the form of questions and answers.

17.5 DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHISM

Let us examine the factors which contributed to the popularity of Buddhism.

17.5.1 Spread of Buddhism

Even during the life time of its founder, Buddhism was accepted by a large section of people. For example people of Magadha, Kosala and Kausambi had embraced Buddhism. The republics of Sakyas, Vajjis and Mallas also followed the process. Later on, Asoka and Kanishka made Buddhism state religion and it spread into central Asia, West Asia and Sri Lanka. This appeal of Buddhism to a large section of population was because of the following factors :

- Emphasis on practical morality, an easily acceptable solution to the problems of mankind and a simple philosophy, attracted the masses towards Buddhism.
- The ideas of social equality laid down in the codes of Buddhism made many lay followers accept Buddhism.
- Merchants, like Anathapindika, and courtesans, like Amrapali, accepted the faith because they got due respect in this religion.
- The use of popular language (Pali) to explain the doctrines also helped in the spread of the religion. This was because the Brahmanical religion had limited itself to the use of Sanskrit which was not the language of the masses.
- The patronage extended by kings was another important reason for the rapid growth of Buddhism. For example according to tradition Asoka sent his son Mahendra and his daughter Sangamitra to Sri Lanka to preach Buddhism. He also established many monastries and contributed liberally to the Sangha.
- The institution of Sangha had helped to organise the spread of Buddhism effectively.

17.5.2 The Institution of the Sangha

The **Sangha** was the religious order of the Buddhists. It was a well organised and powerful institution which popularised Buddhism. Membership was open to all persons, irrespective of caste, above fifteen years of age. Criminals, lepers and persons affected by infectious diseases were not given admission into the **Sangha**. Initially Buddha was not in favour of admitting women in the **Sangha**. However he admitted them at the repeated requests of his chief disciple Ananda and his foster mother Mahapajapati Gotami.

On admission, the monks had to ceremonially shave their head and wear yellow or saffron robes. Monks were expected to go on a daily round in order to preach Buddhism and seek alms. During the four months of the rainy season they took up a fixed abode and meditated. This was called the retreat or '**vasa**'. The **Sanghas** also promoted education among the people. Unlike Brahmanism people of different orders of the society had entry to education. Naturally the non-Brahmins who were deprived of education got access to education in Buddhism and thus education reached wider sections of the society.

The Sangha was governed by democratic principles and was empowered to enforce discipline amongst its members. There was a code of conduct for the monks and nuns and they were bound to obey it. The Sangha had the power to punish the erring members.

17.5.3 Buddhist Councils

According to tradition shortly after the death of Buddha the first Buddhist Council was held in 483 B.C. in the Saptaparni cave near Rajagriha. Mahakassapa presided over the assembly. All the teachings of Buddha were divided into two Pitakas, namely

- a) **Vinaya Pitaka**, and
- b) **Sutta Pitaka**.

The text of **Vinaya Pitaka** was established under the leadership of Upali and those of **Sutta Pitaka** was settled under the leadership of Ananda.

The second Council was held at Vaisali in 383 B.C. The monks of Vaisali and Pataliputra had accepted certain rules which were declared as contrary to the teaching of Buddha by the monks of Kausambi and Avanti. The Council failed to bring about a compromise between the two opposing groups. Hence the council ended in a permanent split of the Buddhist order into **Sthaviravadins** and **Mahasangikas**. The former upheld the orthodox **Vinaya Pitaka** while the latter favoured the new rules and their further relaxation.

The third Council was held at Pataliputra during the reign of Asoka under the chairmanship of Moggaliputta Tissa. In this Council the philosophical interpretations of the doctrines of Buddha were collected into the third **Pitaka** called **Abhidhamma Pitaka**. An attempt was made in this Council to free the Buddhist order from the dissidents and innovations. Heretical monks numbering sixty thousand were expelled from the order. The true canonical literature was defined and authoritatively settled to eliminate all disruptive tendencies.

The fourth Council was held during the reign of Kanishka in Kashmir. This council was a gathering of **Hinayanists** of North India. It compiled three commentaries (**Vibhashas**) of the three **Pitakas**. It decided certain controversial questions of differences that arose between the **Sarvastivada** teachers of Kashmir and Gandhara.

17.5.4 Buddhist Schools

In the second Council held at Vaisali, the Buddhist order was split into two schools namely :

- a) **Sthaviravadins**, and
 - b) **Mahasangikas**
- The **Sthaviravadins** followed strict monastic life and rigid disciplinary laws as originally prescribed.
 - The group which followed a modified disciplinary rules was called the **Mahasangikas**.

Mahayanism developed after the fourth Buddhist Council. In opposition to the group (Hinayana sect) who believed in orthodox teaching of Buddha those who accepted the new ideas were called the Mahayana sect. They made an image of Buddha and worshipped it as god. In the first century A.D., during the period of Kanishka some doctrinal changes were made.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Explain the Buddhist philosophy of 'Nirvana' and 'Karma'. Answer in five lines.

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- 2) List the factors responsible for the growth of Buddhism. Answer in five lines.

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- 3) Mark which of the statements is right (✓) or wrong (×).

- ii) Buddha delivered his first sermon at Bodh Gaya.
- iii) Severe asceticism was preached by Buddha.
- iv) Buddha did not believe in rebirth.
- v) Buddha believed in the existence of God.

17.6 ORIGINS OF JAINISM

According to Jaina traditions, twenty four **Tirthankaras** were responsible for the origin and development of Jaina religion and philosophy. Of these, the first twenty two are of doubtful historicity. In the case of the last two, Parsvanatha and Mahavira, Buddhist works also confirm their historicity.

17.6.1 Parsvanatha

According to Jaina tradition the twenty-third **Tirthankara**, Parsvanatha was the son of King Asvasena of Varanasi and his Queen Vama. He abandoned the throne at the age of thirty and became an ascetic. He received enlightenment after 84 days of penance. He died at the age of 100 years, nearly 250 years before Mahavira. Parsvanatha believed in the eternity of 'matter'. He left behind him a good number of followers. The followers of Parsvanatha wore a white garment. Thus it is clear that even before Mahavira some kind of Jaina faith existed.

17.6.2 Mahavira

The twenty-fourth **Tirthankara** was Vardhamana Mahavira. He was born in Kundagrama (Basukunda), a suburb of Vaisali (Muzaffarpur district, Bihar) in 540 B.C. His father, Siddhartha was the head of Jnatikas, a Kshatriya clan. His mother was Trishala, a Lichchhavi princess. Vardhamana was given a good education and was married to Yashoda. He had a daughter by her.

At the age of thirty, Vardhamana left his home and became an ascetic. At first he wore a single garment which he abandoned after 13 months and began to wander as a 'naked monk'. For twelve years he lived the life of an ascetic following severe austerities. In the 13th year of his asceticism, at the age of 42, he attained the 'supreme knowledge'. He was later known as 'Mahavir' (the supreme hero), or 'Jina' (the conqueror). He was also hailed as 'Nirgrantha' (free from fetters).

For the next thirty years he moved from place to place and preached his doctrines in Kosala, Magadha and further east. He wandered for eight months in a year and spent the four months of the rainy season in some famous town of eastern India. He often visited the courts of Bimbisara and Ajatasatru. He died at Pawa (near Rajagriha) in Patna district at the age of 72 (468 B.C.).

17.7 TEACHINGS OF MAHAVIRA

Mahavira accepted most of the religious doctrines laid down by Parsvanatha. However, he made some alterations and additions to them.

Parsvanatha advocated the following four principles:

- a) truth,
- b) non-violence,
- c) non-possession, and
- d) not to receive anything which was not voluntarily given. To this Mahavira added celibacy (**brahmacharya**).

Mahavira believed that soul (jiva) and matter (ajiva) are the two basic existing elements.

previous births. By means of continued efforts the soul can be relieved of bondage. This is the final liberation (**moksha**) of the soul. The liberated soul then becomes 'the pure soul'.



12. Jain Tirthankara (Gupta Period)

According to Jainism, man is the creator of his own destiny and he could attain '**moksha**' by pursuing a life of purity, virtue and renunciation. **Moksha** (**nirvana**) can be attained by observing the following three principles (**ratnatraya**):

- i) Right belief,
- ii) Right knowledge, and
- iii) Right action.

He advocated a life of severe asceticism and extreme penance for the attainment of '**nirvana**' or the highest spiritual state.

He believed that the world was not created by any supreme creator. The world functions according to an eternal law of decay and development.

He thought that all objects, animate and inanimate had a soul. He believed that they feel pain or the influence of injury.

He rejected the authority of Vedas and objected to Vedic rituals and the supremacy of the Brahmanas.

A code of conduct was prescribed both for householders and for monks. For the purpose of avoiding evil **karmas**, a householder had to observe the following five vows:

- i) non-injury,
- ii) non-stealing,
- iii) non-adultery,
- iv) speaking the truth, and
- v) non-possession.

It was also prescribed that a householder should feed cooked food to the needy everyday.

He preached that lay worshippers should not take to agriculture, since this involved the destruction of plants and insects.

A monk had to observe certain strict rules. He had to abandon all worldly possessions. He had to root out every hair of his head by his own hands. He could walk only during the day, taking care that he did not kill or injure any being. He had to train himself so as not to be affected by objects of the senses.

Jainism believed that the monastic life was essential to attain salvation and a householder could not attain it.

According to tradition the original doctrines taught by Mahavira were contained in 14 old texts known as 'purvas'. In the first Council at Pataliputra, Sthulabhadra divided the Jaina canon into 12 'angas' or sections. This was accepted by Svetambaras. However, the Digambaras refused to accept this claiming that all the old scriptures were lost. At the second Council held at Vallabhi new additions were made in the form of 'Upangas' or minor sections.

Among the 12 angas the **Acharanga sutta** and **Bhagavati sutta** are the most important. While the former deals with the code of conduct which a Jaina monk is required to follow, the later expounds the Jaina doctrines in a comprehensive manner.

17.8 DEVELOPMENT OF JAINISM

Teachings of Mahavira became very popular among the masses and different sections of the society were attracted to it. Like Buddhism in Jainism also with the change of time a lot of changes came in. We will now see what contributed to the spread of this religion and what were the developments in it.

17.8.1 Spread of Jainism

Mahavira had eleven disciples known as **Ganadharas** or heads of schools. Arya Sudharma was the only **Ganadhara** who survived Mahavira and became the first '**Thera**' (chief preceptor) of the Jaina order. He died 20 years after Mahavira's death. The Jain order in the days of the late Nanda King was administered by two **Theras** :

- a) Sambhutavijaya, and
- b) Bhadrabahu.

The sixth **Thera** was Bhadrabahu, a contemporary of the Maurya King Chandragupta Maurya.

The followers of Mahavira slowly spread over the whole country. In many regions royal patronage was bestowed upon Jainism. According to Jain tradition, Udayin, the successor of Ajatsatru was a devoted Jain. Jain monks were seen on the banks of the river Indus, when Alexander invaded India. Chandragupta Maurya was a follower of Jainism and he migrated with Bhadrabahu to the South and spread Jainism. During the early centuries of the Christian era Mathura and Ujjain became great centres of Jainism.

The success of Jainism was more remarkable than Buddhism. One of the important causes for the success was the popular dialect (Prakrit, Religious literature was also written in Ardhamagadhi) used in place of Sanskrit by Mahavira and his followers. The simple and

homely morals prescribed to the masses attracted the people. The patronage extended by Kings helped Jainism to gain a place in the minds of the people.

17.8.2 Jain Councils

Towards the close of Chandragupta Maurya's rule a terrible famine broke out in South Bihar. It lasted for about 12 years. Bhadrabahu and his disciples migrated to Sravanabelgola in Karnataka. Other Jains remained in Magadha with Sthulabhadra as their leader. They summoned a council at Pataliputra at about 300 B.C. In that council the sacred teachings of Mahavira were divided into twelve **angas**.

The second Jain Council was held at Vallabhi (Gujarat) in 512 A.D. and was presided over by Devardhi Kshemasarmana. The purpose of this Council was to collect the Sacred texts and write them down systematically. However this time the 12th **anga** drawn at the first Council was lost. All the remaining **angas** were written in Ardhamagadhi.

17.8.3 Sects

The split in the Jaina order is widest from the third century B.C. The differences over wearing a garment was apparent even during the times of Mahavira. The followers of Bhadrabahu, after their return from Sravanabelgola to Magadha refused to acknowledge the canon holding that all the 14 **purvas** were lost. Moreover a wide gulf had developed between those who emigrated and those who stayed in Magadha. The latter had become accustomed to wearing white garments and made a departure from Mahavira's teachings, while the former still continued going naked and strictly followed his teachings. Hence, the first split in the Jaina order was between the Digambaras (sky clad or naked) and Svetambaras (clad in white).

During the later years further splits took place among both the sections, the most important of them being one that renounced idol worship altogether and devoted itself to the worship of the scriptures. They were called the **Terapanthis** among the Svetambaras and the **Samaiyas** among the Digambaras. (This sect came into existence about the sixth century A.D.)

17.9 OTHER HETERODOX IDEAS

Many non-vedic ideas were prevalent in this period. They later developed into small sects. Among them the Ajivika sect had a considerable number of followers with a recognised organisation.

17.9.1 Ajivikas

The Ajivikas are said to be sudra **sanyasins**. The sect was said to be established by Nanda Vachcha, who was followed by Kisa Sankichcha. The third religious chief was Makkali Gosala, who popularised this sect. He denied the theory of '**karma**' and argued that man is subject to the laws of nature. The Ajivikas believed that the thought and deed of an individual were predetermined (decided before birth). They did not believe that there was any special cause for either the misery of human beings or for their deliverance. They did not believe in human effort and held that all creatures were helpless against destiny. Gosala maintained that all creatures had to face misery and it would end after the completion of fixed cycles. No human effort would reduce or lengthen the period. Gosala's followers centred round Sravasti, the capital of Kosala where Gosala preached and died sixteen years before Mahavira.

17.9.2 Other Ideas

The Charvakas believed in complete materialism. They held that an individual's body is formed of matter and finally would end in matter. Therefore, the aim of human life should be to enjoy all the material pleasures of life.

Purana Kassapa preached the doctrine of Akriya or non-action. He was a Brahman teacher

whose main doctrine was that action did not lead to either merit or demerit. According to him, even if a man killed all the creatures on earth he would not incur any sin. Similarly, he would not earn any merit through a good deed or even by standing on the bank of Ganges. Similarly self-control, gifts and truthfulness would not earn him any credit.

Ajita Kesakambalin preached that everything ended with death and there is no further life after death. He did not believe in the fruits of good or bad acts or persons possessing higher or supernatural powers. According to this sect there is nothing wrong in enjoying the pleasures of the world, and there is no sin in killing.

Pakudha Kachchayna preached the doctrine of Asasvatavada. According to it, there are seven elements, which are immutable and do not in any way contribute to pleasure or pain. The body is ultimately dissolved into these seven elements.

17.10 IMPACT OF THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The rise and development of the new religious ideas had brought some significant changes in the contemporary social life. Following are some of the important changes.

- i) The idea of social equality was popularised in this period. The Buddhists and Jains did not give any importance to the caste system. They accepted members of different castes in their religious order. This was a great threat to the age long domination of the Brahmanas in the society. Acceptance of women in the Buddhist order also had an important impact in the society because this gave women equal status with men in the society.
- ii) Brahmanical texts had assigned an inferior position to traders. Sea voyages were also condemned. But as Buddhists and Jains did not give any importance to caste and did not look down upon sea voyages so the trading community was very much encouraged by these new religious ideas. Moreover the emphasis on 'karma' by this new religious ideas for future life also indirectly favoured the activities of the trading community.
- iii) The new religions gave importance to languages like Prakrit, Pali and Ardha Magadhi. Buddhist and Jaina philosophies were discussed in these languages and later, canons were written in the local languages. This paved the way for the development of vernacular literature. Thus the Jains, for the first time, gave a literary shape to the mixed dialect, Ardha Magadhi, by writing their canons in this dialect.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What are the basic principles of Jainism? Answer in 100 words.

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- 2) Who are Ajivikas ? What are their ideas? Answer in five lines.

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3) Mark which of the statement is right (✓) or wrong (×).

- i) Mahavira added the idea of celibacy to the four principles of Parsvanatha.
- ii) Mahavira did not believe in the supreme creator.
- iii) The concept of 'Nirvana' is same in Buddhism and Jainism.
- iv) The original texts of the doctrines of Mahavira are known as 'Purvas'.
- v) The rise of heterodox sects resulted in the development of vernacular literature.

17.11 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you have seen the emergence and establishment of new religious ideas in the sixth century B.C. in North India. The contemporary socio-economic needs largely contributed to the emergence of these new religious ideas. Among these, Buddhism and Jainism became very popular among the people. In spite of some differences, both the religions put emphasis on humanity, moral life, '**Karma**' and '**Ahimsa**'. Both of them were highly critical of caste system, domination of the Brahmanas, animal sacrifices and the ideas of God. This was a direct challenge to the existing Vedic religion. Besides this, you have also learnt about other heterodox sects like Ajivikas and their ideas. All these brought about a significant change in the attitude of the people and they, as a result, began to question the age long supremacy of the Brahmanical religion.

17.12 KEY WORDS

Ahimsa: Non-killing or non-violence

Heterodox: Non-orthodox

Karma: Action of an individual

Pitakas: Buddhist religious texts

Purvas: Jain religious texts

Schism: Division of an organisation into two or more groups.

Sect: Group of people united by beliefs or opinions.

Tirthankara: Refers to the Jain preachers who acquired supreme knowledge.

17.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) You have to write here, what Buddha meant by '**Nirvana**' and '**Karma**'. See Section 17.4.
- 2) Your answer should include the practical aspect of Buddhism, its emphasis on social equality, popular language, etc. See Sub-sec. 17.5.1.
- 3)
 - i) ✓
 - ii) ×
 - iii) ×
 - iv) ✓
 - v) ×

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) You have to discuss the five principles i.e. truth, non-violence, non-possession, not to receive anything, celibacy and then how one can attain nirvana by following the principles of right belief, right knowledge and right action.

- 2) The sect founded by Nanda Vachcha and is said to be of Sudra **Sanyasins**. They believed that man is subject to the laws of nature. See Sub-sec. 17.10.1.
- 3)
 - i) ✓
 - ii) ✓
 - iii) ×
 - iv) ✓
 - v) ✓

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

Allchin, Bridget and Raymond; *The Rise of Civilisations in India and Pakistan*, New Delhi, 1988

Kosambi, D.D; *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, New Delhi, 1987

Ghosh, A; *The City in Early Historical India*, Simla, 1973

Sharma R.S; *Material Cultures and Social Formations in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1983

Sharma, R.S; *Perspectives in the Social and Economic History of Ancient India*

Wagle, N; *Society at the Time of the Buddha*, Bombay, 1966.

UNIT 18 MAGADHAN TERRITORIAL EXPANSION

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Location of Magadha
- 18.3 Note on Sources
- 18.4 Political History of Pre-Mauryan Magadha
- 18.5 Notion of 'Empire'
 - 18.5.1 Modern views on definition of 'Empire'
 - 18.5.2 Indian notion of **Chakravarti-Ksetra**
- 18.6 Origin of Mauryan rule
- 18.7 Asoka Maurya
 - 18.7.1 The Kalinga War
 - 18.7.2 Magadha at Asoka's death
- 18.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.9 Key Words
- 18.10 Answers To Check Your Progress Exercises

18.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall outline the territorial expansion of the kingdom of Magadha. This will provide an understanding of how and why it was possible for Magadha to become an 'empire'. After reading this Unit you should be able to:

- identify the location of Magadha and its environs and note its strategic importance,
- learn about some of the sources that historians use for writing on this period,
- have a brief idea of the political history of Magadha during the two centuries preceding Mauryan rule.
- understand the notion of 'empire' in the context of early periods of history,
- trace the chief events leading to the establishment of Mauryan rule,
- learn about the early Mauryan kings — Chandragupta and Bindusara — and their expansionist activities,
- explain the context of the accession and coronation of Asoka Maurya and the importance of the Kalinga War, and
- finally, identify the boundaries of the Magadhan 'empire' at the death of Ashoka.

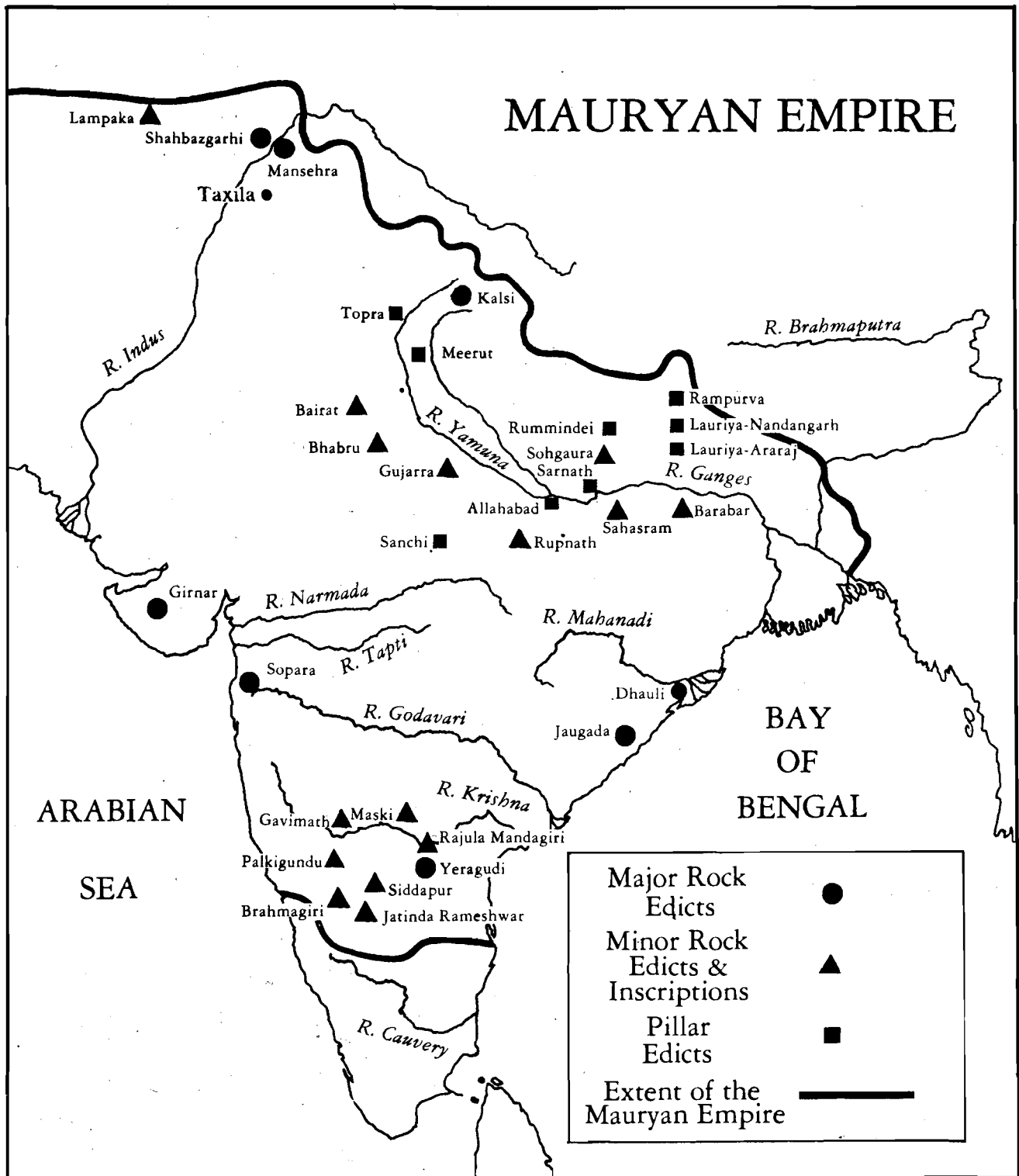
18.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 15 you were introduced to the various **Janapadas** and **Mahajanapadas** that are known to us from primarily early Buddhist and Jaina texts. The rise of these **Janapadas** and **Mahajanapadas**, which were situated mostly north of the Vindhyas, is dated around the second half of the first millennium B.C. In this Unit we shall be discussing in detail the growth of one of these **Mahajanapadas**, namely Magadha. Magadha has drawn the attention of historians for the last two hundred years. This is so because it had become the nucleus of the political power of the well-known Mauryan dynasty.

However, in this Unit we do not intend to highlight only the achievements of the Mauryan kings in expanding the territorial frontiers of Magadha. We shall also discuss the notion of an 'empire' in the pre-modern context at two levels:

- i) Various meanings of the term 'empire' which does not simply mean a territorially vast kingdom, and
- ii) the early Indian notions of state and empire.

By discussing these various definitions, it would be possible to understand the various



views of scholars on the characterization of the Magadhan empire, particularly under the Mauryas.

In this Unit we shall also take into account the political events throughout the period from the fifth to the third century B.C.

The Magadhan Kingdom began to grow during the sixth century B.C. itself. However, this process accelerated considerably under the Nandas and the Mauryas. The location of the Asokan inscriptions indicate that a major part of the Indian sub-continent, excluding the eastern and southern extremities, had come under Magadhan suzerainty. However, after discussing the details of how this expansion took place, we shall introduce you to the view that the composition and texture of the Magadhan empire, in its various parts, was so diverse that to be able to hold it together, direct political control was probably very difficult. This may perhaps explain why Asoka endeavoured to resolve the inherent social tensions in the empire through the introduction of his policy of **Dhamma** (You will learn more about it in Unit-21).

18.2 LOCATION OF MAGADHA

You have been generally introduced to the Kingdom of Magadha as one of the sixteen **Mahajanapadas** in Unit 14 of Block-4.

The **Mahajanapadas** were located over a major part of the Ganga Valley with a few to the north-west and south-west of it. However, of the four most powerful kingdoms, three – Kosala, the Vajji Confederacy and Magadha – lay in the middle Ganga Valley and the fourth, Avanti was in Western Malwa. The kingdoms that surrounded Magadha were Anga in the east, the Vajji Confederacy to the north, to its immediate west the kingdom of Kasi and further west, the kingdom of Kosala.

Magadha can be identified with the modern districts of Patna, Gaya, Nalanda and parts of Shahabad in the present day State of Bihar. Geographically, Magadha's location is such that it has in its vicinity large tracts of alluvial soil. Interestingly, the earliest capital of Magadha, Rajgriha was situated to the south of the river and not near it. This is most plausibly explained from the point of view of its strategic location and, secondly, due to the fact that it lay in the vicinity of iron-encrusted outcrops. It has also been suggested that its accessibility to copper as well as the forests of the present-day southern Bihar region can effectively explain why early Magadhan kings did not choose to have their capital in the most fertile plains of the Ganges Valley but in a comparatively isolated region. The capital of Magadha did however, shift to Pataliputra (originally Pataligrama), situated on the confluence of several rivers like the Ganga, Gandak, Son and Pun Pun. Pataliputra became the capital of Magadha under the Mauryas. This enabled Magadha to effectively command the **uttarapatha** (northern route) which lay to the north of the river Ganges, along the foothills of the Himalayas. The river also came to be used as one of the main arteries connecting Magadha with different regions and making heavy transport along the river possible. Thus Magadha had certain natural advantages over other contemporaneous kingdoms, though some of which like Avanti to its south-west, Kosala to its north-west and the Vajji Confederacy to its north were equally powerful at the turn of the sixth century B.C.

Recent researches have suggested that accessibility to the iron mining areas in particular enabled kingdoms like Magadha and Avanti to not only produce good weapons of warfare but also in other ways. It facilitated expansion of agrarian economy and thereby, the generation of substantial surplus, extracted by the State in the form of taxes. This in turn enabled them to expand and develop their territorial base. Avanti, it must be noted, became a serious competitor of Magadha for quite some time and was also located not far from the iron mines in eastern Madhya Pradesh.

18.3 NOTE ON SOURCES

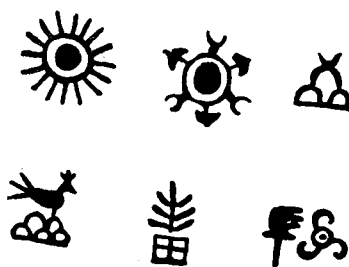
The events and traditions of the middle Ganga plains where Magadha was prominently located, are well preserved in the early Buddhist and Jain literature.

Some of the texts of the Buddhist tradition are compiled as the **Tripitikas** and the **Jatakas**. Those pertaining to the early Jain tradition are the **Acaranga Sutra** and **Sutrakritanga** which are considered earlier than the others. All these were however written or compiled well after the sixth century B.C., at different times. For particularly the early events of a political nature, Buddhist and Jaina traditions represent them more authentically and directly than do the later Brahmanical accounts of the various **Puranas** which attempt to provide histories of royal dynasties to the period of the Guptas. Later Buddhist chronicles like the **Mahavamsa** and **Dipavamsa** compiled in Sri Lanka are significant sources for the events related particularly to Asoka Maurya's reign. These, along with the **Divyavadana** (which is preserved outside India in the Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist sources) not being contemporary to the period under discussion, have to be used cautiously as they developed in the context of Buddhism's spread outside India.

Foreign sources of information which are considerably more relevant and are near-contemporary, are accounts gathered from classical writings in Greek and Latin. These are impressions of travellers who visited India around that time, and the name of Megasthenes, who visited the court of Chandragupta Maurya, is famous in this respect. Megasthenes is, however, known to us only through quotations in later Greek writings of Strabo and Diodorus of the first century B.C. and Arrian of the second century A.D. Since north-west India from about the sixth century B.C. till about the fourth century B.C. was under the sphere of foreign rule, some of the information on the phase of Achaemenian (Persian) rule and later, on the invasion of Alexander, comes to us from the Persian inscriptions and Greek sources like Herodotus' account.

Ever since its discovery in 1905, the **Arthashastra** of Kautilya has been considered an important source of information for the Mauryan period. Today, several new views on the date of the **Arthashastra** have emerged, some of which suggest that it should not be considered in totality a text written in the Mauryan period. Thus, it is suggested on the basis of a statistical method that some of the chapters of the **Arthashastra** should be dated to the first two centuries of the Christian era. However, many other scholars would like to use a major portion of this text for the Mauryan period. They suggest that the text was originally written by Kautilya, the minister of Chandragupta, and commented upon and edited by other writers during a subsequent period.

Both inscriptions and coins as important sources of information for understanding the early history of India become significant during the Mauryan period. The coins of this period however do not bear names of kings, and they are called punch-marked coins because different symbols are punched on them separately. Though this type of coin is known from roughly about the fifth century B.C., the Mauryan punch-marked series are significant in that they were probably issued by a central authority as is indicated by the uniformity of the symbols used. In contrast to the coins, the inscriptional material for particularly Asoka Maurya's rule is extremely significant and unique in content. There are fourteen major edicts, seven minor rock edicts, seven pillar edicts and other inscriptions of Asoka located at prominent places near towns and trade routes in various parts of the Indian sub-continent. They markedly stand out as a physical testimony to the length and breadth of the Magadhar empire at the close of Asoka's reign.



1. Symbols on Punch-Marked Coins.

Archaeology as a source of information has, in recent years, yielded considerable data on the material cultures of the Ganga Valley. The nature of this archaeological material has already been discussed in Unit 15 of Block 4. We know that the archaeological phase associated with the Northern Black Polished Ware was the period when cities and towns emerged, and during the Mauryan period, as archaeology suggests, there were further changes in the material life of the people. From Archaeology we also know that many elements of material culture started spreading to areas outside the Ganga Valley and that they came to be associated with Mauryan rule.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Tick the right answer (✓).
Magadha was surrounded by the following three kingdoms:
 - a) Avanti, Kosala, Anga
 - b) Anga, Kosala, Vajji Confederacy
 - c) Anga, Vajji Confederacy, Kassi
 - d) Avanti, Kasi, Kosala

- 2) Describe the important sources for reconstructing the history of Magadha in about five lines.

- 3) List three important factors which were advantageous for the growth of the Magadhan Kingdom.

- 4) Mark which of the following statements is right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - a) Inscriptions are the most important source of information for the pre-Mauryan period.
 - b) The Mauryan punch-marked coins have uniform symbols.
 - c) The **uttarapatha** was a route which followed the course of the river Ganges.
 - d) Pataliputra was situated south of the river Ganges.
 - e) Megasthenes' account of India is known to us through later writers.

18.4 POLITICAL HISTORY OF PRE-MAURYAN MAGADHA

Under Bimbisara who was a contemporary of the Buddha and who, like the Buddha, lived in the 6th – 5th century B.C. Magadha emerged as a controller of the middle Ganga plains. Bimbisara is considered to be the first important ruler of Magadha. With political foresight he realised the importance of establishing dynastic relations through marriage with the royal house of Kosala. Through this alliance he acquired a part of the district of Kasi as dowry. He had cordial relations with the king of Gandhara. These diplomatic relations can be considered as a sign of the strength of Magadha. To the east of Magadha lay the Kingdom of Anga whose capital Champa

ruled over 80,000 villages. Tradition tells us that Bimbisara was imprisoned by his son Ajatasatru who is said to have starved him to death. This is reported to have taken place around 492 B.C.

Internal troubles and the succession of Ajatasatru to the throne of Magadha did not change its fortune. In terms of expansionist policies the new Magadhan king followed a decisively more aggressive policy. He gained complete control over Kasi and broke the earlier amicable relations by attacking his maternal uncle Prasenajit, the king of Kosala. The Vajji Confederation of people whose **Mahajanapada** lay to the north of the Ganga was Ajatasatru's next target of attack. This war was a lengthy one and tradition tells us that after a long period of sixteen years he was able to defeat the Vajjis only through deceit by sowing the seeds of dissension amongst them. His invasion of the kingdom of Avanti, the strongest rival of Magadha at that time did not materialise though preparations are said to have been made for it. However, during his reign Kasi and Vaisali, the capital of Vajji **Mahajanapada**, had been added to Magadha, making it the most powerful territorial power in the Ganga Valley.

Ajatasatru is said to have ruled from 492 B.C. to 460 B.C. He was succeeded by Udayin (460-444 B.C.). During Udayin's reign the Magadhan kingdom extended in the north to the Himalayan ranges and in the south to the Chhota Nagpur hills. He is said to have built a fort on the confluence of the Ganga and the Son. Despite the vastness of Magadha's territories, Udayin and the four kings who succeeded him were unable to effectively rule and the last of these is said to have been overthrown by the people of Magadha. Shishunaga, a viceroy at Banaras, was placed on the throne in 413 B.C. The rule of the Shishunaga dynasty too was of short duration and gave way to the rule of the Nanda dynasty headed by the usurper Mahapadma Nanda.

It was during the rule of the Nandas in Magadha and the Ganga Plains as a whole that the invasion of Alexander took place in north-west India in 326 B.C., often considered the beginning of the historic period in India. The Nandas are therefore, often described as the first empire-builders of India. It must however be underlined that they did inherit a large kingdom of Magadha which they then extended to more distant frontiers.

In the later **Purana** writings Mahapadma Nanda is described as the exterminator of all **kshatriyas**. It is further suggested that he overthrew all the contemporary ruling houses. The Greek classical writings describe the might of the Nanda empire when they tell us about their vast army which is said to have consisted of 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 2000 chariots and 3000 elephants. We also have some indications that the Nandas had contact with the Deccan and South India. Their control of some parts of Kalinga (modern Orissa) is indicated in the Hathigumpha inscription of king Kharavela, who ruled in Orissa from the middle of the first century B.C. Some very late inscriptions from the south Karnataka region also suggest that parts of the Deccan may have been included in the Magadhan empire under the Nandas. Most historians suggest that by the end of the reign of Mahapadma Nanda the first phase of the expansion and consolidation of the Kingdom of Magadha had taken place. That the north-west was still under various small chiefdoms is attested by the Greek writings describing Alexander's invasion of the Punjab around this time. It is clear, however, that there was no encounter between the Kingdom of Magadha and the Greek conqueror.

The Nanda rule came to an end by 321 B.C. Nine Nanda kings are said to have ruled and by the end of their rule they are said to have become very unpopular. Chandragupta Maurya took advantage of this situation to ascend the throne of Magadha. Despite all these dynastic changes, **Magadha** continued to remain the foremost kingdom in the Ganga Valley. Deeper reasons for the success of Magadha lay in its advantageous geographical location, its access to the iron mines and the control it had come to exercise over important land and river trade routes. In the next part of this Unit we turn to take a look at **Magadha** as an 'empire' and the **Mauryan** control of it.

18.5 NOTION OF 'EMPIRE'

Before we talk of the Mauryan empire, let us try to understand what an 'empire' means. This is necessary because we often indiscriminately use the term empire in

relation to all types of kingdoms or states. Further, we somehow seem to think that ancient, medieval and modern empires were all identical in nature. Obviously, the nature of the British empire of modern times or even the Central Asian Mongol empire of the medieval times could not have been identical with the nature of the Mauryan empire. There were important differences between empires in different periods of history, and when we study the history of an ancient empire, it is important that we understand what essential elements constituted an empire.

18.5.1 Modern Views on Definition of 'Empire'

Most often 'empire' is understood to designate a political system which has under a central control a vast expanse of territories not all of which are necessarily culturally homogeneous. The centre in this definition is embodied either in the person of the king or emperor or, in the political institution which is organised to hold together the territories under one control. The term 'Imperial' comes from the Latin word **imperium**. This indicates relative concentration of authority at the centre. The centre controls territorially contiguous units which ultimately attain some symbols of common political identity. Generally, the Roman empire in the ancient world is taken as the classical example to which all others, including the Mauryan, are then compared.

This definition, however, should not be understood as connoting sovereign nation states some of which built vast empires in modern times. The nature of the central authority in early empires was either dependent on the charismatic personality of rulers and leaders and their exploits and most importantly, their upholding of a certain order of things which are sanctioned by tradition.

The common view about the Magadhan empire of the Mauryas is that it could best be understood as a centralized bureaucratic empire. This kind of an 'empire' was prevalent in other parts of the world as well.

Centralized bureaucratic empires were usually established through the military and other exploits of individuals, generally in periods of turmoil, strife and unrest of various kinds, and thus the establishment of their rule is considered to have brought about peace and order. At the same time it would be natural for such empires to have enemies because in their rise to power they must have either usurped or challenged various interest groups. In new territories their policy of aggrandizement nurtures animosity. The rulers have therefore, to make allies, passive or active, to implement their aims through either matrimonial or diplomatic alliances.

In terms of political goals such empires visualize a unified centralized polity in which decision making is monopolized. This means that they replace earlier traditional or local tribal authorities. In the rise and success of such empires geo-political factors are usually said to shape their activities. It was absolutely essential for such empires to be able to mobilize various resources, those of economic raw materials and man-power in particular. For active political support these empires were usually dependent on urban economic, cultural and professional groups and in a passive sense, from the wider social strata of peasants and urban lower classes. Recruitment from upper class groups ensured the proper functioning of administrative bodies. In the ultimate analysis the administration thus evolved was expected to work for exploitative purposes. In other words, in the early empires, there was a high degree of inequality in society, permitting the privileged groups and the privileged regions to exploit the resources produced by others.

18.5.2 Indian Notion of Chakravarti-Kshetra

In understanding the Mauryan phase of the Magadhan empire, or indeed, any other 'empire' of ancient India, it may be useful to know how an ideal emperor was viewed in ancient literature. The idea of an emperor is expressed through the Sanskrit term **Chakravarti** and the sphere of his 'imperial rule' by the term **chakravarti-ksetra**. Though in early Brahmanic texts kings performing sacrifices like **Ashvamedha** and **Rajasuya** are mentioned, it is only in the **Arthashastra** that a clear idea is given of what a **chakravarti-ksetra** was. It is said to be the land which extended north to south from the Himalaya to the seas (of the Indian Ocean) and measured a thousand **yojanas**. There is no doubt that the **Chakravarti** ideal reflected conventional ideas about Indian ruler's sphere of influence and, infact, it was an ideal never achieved, except perhaps by Asoka. On the other hand, this aspiration of universal conquest is

constantly emphasized in exaggerated terms in both literary and epigraphical sources. Historians have often taken these reflections to indicate the actual achievement of large territorial conquests by kings and thus misreading the ideal for the actual achievements.

The **Arthashastra**, and several other texts, also list the different limbs (**angas**) which together made a **rashtra** (state). Of the seven limbs of the State mentioned in the **Arthashastra**, the king, is made out to be the most powerful. The seven elements (**saptanga**) of the State in the general texts on ancient Indian polity are stated to be ministers (**mantri**), ally (**mitra**), taxes (**kara**), army (**sena**), fort (**durga**), land or territory (**desh**) and to these, the **Arthashastra** significantly adds an eighth element, the enemy (**shatru**). In defining the king as the most powerful being in the State, Kautilya the author of **Arthashastra** also expects him to have exceptional qualities. You will read more about how the king organised the State and administered his empire in Unit 20. Some of these ideas about state and empire as defined above have led historians for some time to consider Magadha under the Mauryas to have become a despotic state with the king controlling all regions of the empire through a centralized administration. This has now been questioned, and we shall review some of these views below. One can, however, clearly say that the success of Magadha marked the triumph of a monarchical form of political organisation over other, such as **ganga-samgha** forms, of political organisation.

Check Your Progress 2

Use space given below for your answers:

- 1) Tick the right answers using the code given below:
The early kings of Magadha entrenched its stability by achieving the following:

- i) shifting the capital to Pataliputra
- ii) conquering the Anga capital of Champa
- iii) expanding the frontier upto Gandhara
- iv) incorporating the neighbouring kingdoms through war and alliance
- v) capturing the iron mines of Avanti

code

- a) i, ii, iii
- b) i, iv, v
- c) ii, iv
- d) iii, v

- 2) To what extent do you think that the Nanda rule in Magadha was significant?
Write in five lines.

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- 3) On the basis of the definitions given above about what constitutes an empire, how would you describe the Mauryan empire? Answer in about five lines. Also discuss it with the Counsellor at the Study Centre.

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- 4) Mention which of the following statements are correct (✓) or wrong (×).
- The Magadhan empire can be described as a conquest empire.
 - The Magadhan empire can be described as a centralised bureaucratic empire.
 - The most important element of State in early texts was the army.
 - The ideal of a Chakravarti was achieved by most ancient Indian kings.
 - The king in the *Arthashastra* was expected to have exceptional qualities.

18.6 ORIGIN OF MAURYAN RULE

It has been suggested by D.D. Kosambi that the most immediate and unexpected byproduct of Alexander's invasion of the north-west was that "it hastened the Mauryan conquest of the whole country." He has argued thus because since the tribes of Punjab had already been weakened, it was not difficult for the Magadhan army under Chandragupta to conquer the whole of Punjab. Most of the Gangetic Valley was already under the control of Magadha. According to Classical sources, Chandragupta is supposed to have even met Alexander and advised him to attack Magadha which was under the unpopular rule of the Nandas. Though this is difficult to verify, both Indian and Classical sources suggest that Alexander's retreat resulted in the creation of a vacuum, and, therefore, it was not difficult for Chandragupta to subdue the Greek garrisons left there. However, what is not clear is whether he did this after his accession to the throne of Magadha or before it. Some scholars date his accession to 324 B.C. while now it is generally accepted as 321 B.C.

According to Indian tradition Chandragupta was assisted by the Brahmin Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, to rise to power. It is further suggested on the basis of a play of the sixth century A.D. which in its description of the overthrow of the Nandas by Chandragupta, hints that at his accession to the throne at twenty-five years of age, he was in fact a weak ruler and the real ruler of the empire was Chanakya. The *Arthashastra* is attributed to Chanakya who is said to have been well-versed in not only the political principles of warfare and aggrandisement, but was also deeply knowledgeable about the organisation of the State and society to ensure that the empire did not collapse.

Though the early years of Chandragupta's reign are little known, most historians agree to assign either a 'low caste' or a tribal origin to the Maurya family. According to some accounts Chandragupta was the son of the last Nanda king by a "low born" woman called Mura; from her came the family name Maurya. The Buddhist tradition tells us that he was a member of the Moriya clan of Pippalivana and thus suggests that this dynasty was in some way linked to the tribe of the Sakyas to which the Buddha belonged. In this explanation the family name Maurya is said to have been derived from the name of the tribe. This also indirectly implies that as an old family of chiefs they were in some senses Kshatriyas. The *Puranas* do not link the Nanda and Maurya dynasties, though they too describe the latter to be Shudras. The Brahmanical perception about them is however based on its earlier idea of the Magadhan society generally being unrighteous and of mixed caste origin. The Classical sources which know of the last Nanda king also do not link these two dynasties, though Chandragupta, known to them as *Sandrakottus*, is described to be of low origin. It is also suggested that the name ending 'Gupta' in Chandragupta's name, and the later episode of Asoka's marriage to the daughter of a merchant of Vidisa, lend credence to the view that the Mauryas could have been of Vaishya origin.

Though the caste affiliation of the Mauryas remains obscure, it is significant that the most important rulers of this dynasty turned to the heterodox sects later in their lives. On the other hand, the several sources that point to the role of the Brahmin Kautilya as the advisor and the motivating force behind Chandragupta cannot be ignored. The *Puranas* even suggest that Chanakya had appointed Chandragupta as the king of the realm. One can perhaps suggest that the Mauryas rose to power in a society which was never very orthodox. In the north-west there had been considerable contact with the foreigners and Magadha itself was looked down upon in Orthodox Brahmanical tradition. Besides, it was considerably exposed to the ideas of Buddha and Mahavira. It was thus amidst considerable turmoil—social and political—that Chandragupta was successful in ascending the throne of Magadha.

Many historians who understand the Mauryan state as an empire primarily in terms of its territorial extent, attribute great importance to the role Chandragupta Maurya played in ruthlessly stemming the tide of foreign interference in the north-west and suppressing indigenous rulers in west and south India. Source material on the exact nature of these military exploits is wanting and therefore, one has to construct these details on the basis of accounts which are available for his successors who inherited this empire.

Both Indian and Classical sources agree that Chandragupta overthrew the last of the Nanda kings and occupied his capital Pataliputra and this success is linked with his accession to the throne in around 321 B.C. As mentioned earlier, the political rise of Chandragupta was also linked with the invasion of Alexander in the north-west. The years 325 B.C. – 323 B.C. were crucial in the sense that many of the governors who were stationed in the north-west after Alexander's invasion were assassinated or had to retreat and this enabled Chandragupta to gain control of this region rather quickly. Here, it needs to be stated that there is an uncertainty about whether Chandragupta routed the foreigners first or defeated the Nandas. In any case both these tasks were complete by 321 B.C. and the state was set for further consolidation.

One of the first major achievements of Chandragupta Maurya on the military front was his contact with Seleucus Nikator who ruled over the area west of the Indus around 305 B.C. In the war that ensued Chandragupta is said to have turned out victorious and eventually, peace was established with this Greek viceroy in around 303 B.C. In return for 500 elephants Seleucus gave him eastern Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the area west of the Indus. The Satrapies thus called were Arachosia, Paropanisadae, Aria and Gedrosia. A marriage alliance was also concluded. Further, Seleucus sent an ambassador called Megasthenes who lived in the court of Chandragupta for many years. This achievement meant that the territorial foundation of the Mauryan empire had been firmly laid with the Indus and Gangetic plains well under Chandragupta's control.

It is suggested by a majority of scholars that Chandragupta ultimately established his control not only in the north-west and the Ganges plains, but also in western India and the Deccan. The only parts left out of his empire were thus present day Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of North-eastern India. Details of the conquests in different parts of India are lacking. The Greek writers simply mention that Chandragupta Maurya overran the whole country with an army of 600,000. The conquest and subjugation of Surashtra or Kathiawar in the extreme west is attested in the Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman of the middle of the second century A.D. This record refers to Chandragupta's viceroy or governor, Pushyagupta by name, who is said to have constructed the famous Sudarshana Lake. This further implies that Chandragupta had under the control the Malwa region as well. With regard to his control over the Deccan too we have late sources. These are some medieval epigraphs informing us that Chandragupta had protected parts of Karnataka.

The Tamil writers of the Sangam texts of the early centuries A.D. make allusion to the "Moriyar" which is said to refer to the Mauryas and their contact with the South, but this probably refers to the reign of Chandragupta's successor. Finally, the Jaina tradition informs us that Chandragupta having become a Jain abdicated the throne and went South with Bhadrabahu, the Jain saint. At Sravana Belgola, the Jaina religious centre in south Karnataka, he spent the rest of his life and died in the orthodox Jain way by slow starvation.

Bindusara, the son of Chandragupta, is said to have ascended the throne in 297 B.C. There is comparatively little known about him from either Indian or Classical sources. To the latter he is known as Amitrochates. They also inform us that he had contacts with the Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus I, whom he requested to send him sweet wine, dried figs and a sophist.

In a very late source of the sixteenth century, in the work of the Buddhist monk Taranath of Tibet, we are told of Bindusara's warlike activities. He is said to have destroyed kings and nobles of about sixteen cities and reduced to submission all the territory between the eastern and western seas. The descriptions of early Tamil poets' of the Mauryan chariots thundering across the land probably refer to his reign. Many scholars believe that since Asoka is credited to have conquered only Kalinga, the extension of the Mauryan empire beyond the Tungabhadra must have been the work

of his predecessors. It can therefore be suggested that it was probably in Bindusara's reign that the Mauryan control of the Deccan, and the Mysore plateau in particular, was firmly entrenched.

Though Bindusara is called "slayer of foes", his reign is not very well documented, and, therefore, the extent of his conquests can only be arrived at by looking at a map of the empire of Asoka who conquered only Kalinga (Orissa). His religious leanings are said to have been towards the Ajivikas. Buddhist sources suggest the death of Bindusara around 273-272 B.C. After his death there was a struggle for succession among his sons for about four years. Ultimately, around 269-268 B.C. Asoka was crowned Bindusara's successor.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Mention which of the statements are correct (✓), or wrong (×).
 - a) On the advice of Chandragupta, Alexander invaded Magadha.
 - b) The Nanda and Mauryan families were related by blood.
 - c) Chandragupta was able to defeat Seleucus Nikator.
 - d) Chandragupta and Bindusara conquered India upto Kanyakumari.
 - e) Bindusara had contacts with the Seleucid king, Antiochus-I.
- 2) What are the various ways in which the caste/origin of the Mauryan family can be explained? Give some of the views in about five lines.

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18.7 ASOKA MAURYA

Till about 1837 A.D. Asoka Maurya was not a very well known king. In that year James Prinsep deciphered a Brahmi inscription referring to a king called **Devanampiya Piyadasi** (Beloved of the Gods). This was compared with what was known from the Sri Lankan chronicle **Mahavamsa** and then it could be established that the king of the inscription was indeed Asoka Maurya. The fame of Asoka is due to the fact that he turned away from war and tried to establish a system of rule based on the principle of **Dhamma**. Below, we discuss some relevant details of his early life, the Kalinga War and the extent of the Mauryan empire during his reign.

18.7.1 The Kalinga War

During his father's reign Asoka served as a Viceroy at Ujjain and also at Taxila. It is suggested that he was sent to Taxila for a special purpose, namely, to quell a revolt. After being successful at Taxila, the Buddhist sources tell us, he was sent to Ujjain as Viceroy. The events in his personal life here, like his marriage to a Vidisha merchant's daughter and the birth of their two children **Mahinda** and **Sanghamita**, are said to have had a great influence in turning Asoka towards Buddhism. Many of the details about his early life come from the Buddhist chronicles, and, therefore, certain ambiguities in them cannot be denied.

About the accession of Asoka too there are several versions, but there is some general agreement that he was in fact not the crown prince (Yuvaraja). Therefore, he was involved in a struggle against other princes before he ascended the throne. His portrayal as an extremely wicked king before his conversion to Buddhism is undoubtedly exaggerated in Buddhist accounts so as to enhance his piety as a Buddhist. It is necessary to point out that though Buddhism played a significant role in Asoka's later life, one has to discount those versions that depict him as a fanatic or bigot. An idea of the King's personality and beliefs comes through more clearly from his many inscriptions in which his public and political role are both described.



2. Asokan Pillar (Lauriya, Nandangarh)



3. Bull Crowned Column (Rampurva)



4. Asokan Capital Column (Sarnath)

They also suggest his conversion to Buddhism to have taken place after the Kalinga War.

Though Asoka's predecessors had intruded into the Deccan and the South and perhaps conquered parts of it, Kalinga, i.e., the present-day State of Orissa, still had to be brought under Mauryan control. It was of strategic importance as it controlled routes to South India both by land and sea. Asoka himself in Rock Edict XIII describes his conquest of Kalinga which is said to have taken place eight years after his consecration, around 260 B.C. In this war the Kalingans were completely routed and "One hundred thousand were slain, and many times that number died." Though on the battlefield Asoka, was victorious, the inscription goes on to describe his remorse which then ultimately turned him towards **Dhamma**. A policy of conquest through war was given up and replaced by a policy of conquest through **Dhammavijaya**. This was meant to work both at the State and personal levels, and totally transformed the attitude of the king and his officials towards their subjects.

18.7.2 Magadha at Asoka's Death

The location of the various Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts through which Asoka preached his policy of **Dhamma** gives us a fair idea of the extent of the Magadha empire during his reign. There are fourteen Major Rock Edicts, seven Pillar Edicts and some Minor Rock Inscriptions which give us this information. The Major Rock Edicts are located at Shahbazgarhi and Maneshra near Peshawar, Kalsi near Dehra Dun, Sopara in Thana district, Girnar near Junagarh in Kathiawar, Dhauuli near Bhuvaneshwar and Jaugada in Gangam district of Orissa. In Karnataka, the Minor Rock Edicts appear among other places at Siddapura, Jatinga-Rameshwara and Brahmagiri. Other Minor Rock Edicts are found at Rupnath near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, Sahasram in Bihar, Bairat near Jaipur in Rajasthan and Maski in Karnataka. The Pillars bearing Asoka's inscriptions are found in Delhi (originally located at Topara near Ambala and Meerut), Kausambi in Uttar Pradesh, Lauriya Araraj, Lauriya Nandagarh and Rampurva in Bihar; Sanchi, near Bhopal; Sarnath, near Benaras; and Rummindei in Nepal. The exact location of these sites is indicated in the map attached to this Unit and gives a clear idea of the large territorial spread of the empire under Asoka. The placement of the edicts also highlights the care with which they were located on important trade routes linking river and road traffic. Therefore, as suggested by recent writings on the subject, access to raw materials appears to have been the main motivation particularly in controlling the Peninsula.

The Edicts also describe people on the borders of the empire and this confirms the delineation of the empire noted above. In the South are mentioned the Cholas, Pandyas, Sataputras and Keralaputras as people living outside the Mauryan empire. Inside the empire too there were people of diverse origins and diverse cultures. For example, in the north-west are mentioned the Kambojas and Yavanas. They are mentioned along with other peoples like the Bhojas, Pitinikas, Andhras and Pulindas who can be located in parts of western India and the Deccan.

Apart from studying the locations of Asoka's edicts on a map, the exact extent of his empire can be ascertained, to some extent by distinguishing the 'Conquest territories' (**Vijita**) and 'royal territories' (**Raja-vishaya**) from the bordering territories (**pratyanta**). Just as the territory of the Seleucid king Antiochus-II lay outside his empire in the north-west, so were the territories of the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Keralaputras and the Satyaputras, as also the island of Srilanka outside his empire in the south. In the east the empire of the Mauryas seems to have included north and south Bengal.

The Magadhan empire thus reached its greatest territorial expansion under Asoka. However, simultaneously, there was also a conscious attempt to end all wars in his empire. The extension of the principle of non-violence to state policy was a unique experiment that was never repeated in the annals of the political history of India. Often, in writings of different historians, Asoka has been idealized as a benevolent despot. This tends to overlook the more enabled Asoka to ideologically control a vast empire which otherwise would perhaps have been difficult to rule. Finally, though the findspots of the Mauryan inscriptions are on well known trade routes, some of them bordering peripheral zones of the empire, it still remains to be conclusively decided whether the regions where no evidence of inscriptions is found, were controlled in the same way as those where they were found. Both, the questions

about the administrative control of the Mauryas and the policy of **Dhamma** shall be taken up for detailed study in Units 20 and 21.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Write a note in about five to six lines on why there was a change in the policy of conquest under Asoka?

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- 2) Use the code given below to identify which of the following statements about Asoka are correct:
- i) Asoka was the crown prince and the successor to Bindusara.
 - ii) During the latter half of his life he turned towards Buddhism.
 - iii) Asoka inscriptions were inscribed when conquest of a region had been made.
 - iv) He replaced the policy of conquest of war by conquest of **dhamma**.
 - v) Asoka in his inscriptions is usually known as **Davanampiya Piyadassi**.

Code:

- a) ii, iv, v
- b) i, iii, iv
- c) ii, iii, iv
- d) i, iv, v

18.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have attempted to introduce to you the way in which the first historical empire can be studied and also the details on the rise and territorial expansion of Magadha. It is hoped that after going through this Unit you have been able to learn:

- the importance of the strategic location of Magadha and factors responsible for its rise,
- the sources that can be used for writing about the political history of Magadha, in particular with Mauryan rule,
- the chief events in the early history of Magadha before the rise of Mauryan rule,
- the explanation about the notion of 'empire' in the context of early period of history,
- details pertaining to the origin of the Mauryan family and their early history,
- the expansionist policies of Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara,
- issues surrounding the accession of Asoka Maurya and his activities upto the Kalinga War, and
- the extent of the Magadhan empire at the death of Asoka.

18.9 KEY WORDS

Aggrandizement: Aggression.

Autocratic: An absolute ruler whose authority is unchallenged.

Benevolent Despotism: Good or benign ruler but who exerts absolute control.

Chakravarti-Ksetra; The sphere of influence of a chakravarti or universal emperor.

Confederacy: League or alliance of states

Contiguous: Adjacent or adjoining each others.

Dhamma/Dharma: Literally 'universal order' but in its use in Asokan inscriptions it is translated to mean 'piety'.

Satrapy/Satrapies: A term originally derived from an old Iranian institution, it referred to the provinces into which an empire was divided and which were placed under the charge of satraps.

Saptanga: Seven limbs or parts.

Sophist: A philosopher, literally 'one meant to deceive'.

Surplus: 'Amount left over when all consumption requirements have been met'. In an economic sense the difference between the value of goods produced and wages paid.

Uttarapatha: Northern route usually referring to the land route running along the foothills of the Himalayas.

Yojanas: Unit of measurement in ancient India.

18.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) (c) (✓)
- 2) Consult Sec. 18.3
- 3) See Sec. 18.2
- 4) (a) × (b) (✓) (c) × (d) × (e) (✓)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) (c) (✓)
- 2) See last part of Sec. 18.4
- 3) See Sec. 18.5 and also consult Sec. 18.6
- 4) (a) × (b) (✓) (c) × (d) × (e) (✓)

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) (a) × (b) × (c) (✓) (d) × (e) (✓)
- 2) Consult Sec. 18.7.1

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Sub-sec. 18.8.2 and Map
- 2) Consult Sub-sec. 18.8.1
- 3) (a) (✓)

UNIT 19 ECONOMY OF THE MAURYAN PERIOD

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Material and Social Basis of Production
- 19.3 Agriculture and Land Revenue
 - 19.3.1 General Features of Agrarian Economy
 - 19.3.2 Land Revenue Organisation
- 19.4 Trade and Towns
 - 19.4.1 Organisation of Trade
 - 19.4.2 Growth of Urban Economy
 - 19.4.3 Socio-Economic Changes in Mauryan India
- 19.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.6 Key Words
- 19.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

19.0 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this Unit is to introduce to you one of the most important aspects of Mauryan history, namely, the organisation and changes that took place in the economy of India during this period. Though our focus will be on the Mauryan heartland, the Ganges Valley, we also intend to draw your attention to significant changes that were initiated in this period in other parts of India. After going through this Unit you should be able to:

- understand how different types of resources which are necessary for sustaining an empire were utilised,
- understand the main features of agrarian economy, agrarian expansion and land revenue during this period,
- explain how trade was organised and how it expanded, opening up new areas of activity,
- understand the nature of urban economy as also how towns and cities grew in the period,
- discuss improvements in technology that occurred during this period and,
- analyse how the above developments led to significant socio-economic changes.

19.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit-18 of this Block you studied about the establishment and expansion of the Mauryan empire. Here, in this Unit we will familiarise you with the economy of the Mauryan period. In Block-4 you must have read about the nature of economy in the period before the establishment of Mauryan rule. Here we will concentrate on the developments which took place during the Mauryan period. We shall start with a general discussion on material and social basis of agricultural and non-agricultural production. Study of agrarian economy is very crucial because the bulk of the population was involved in agriculture. We shall also familiarise you with the organisation of land revenue collection. We shall also take into account the impact of agrarian economy on other spheres of economic activity.

This impact was more evident in craft production and commercial activities. Growth in these areas led to:

- improvement in technology,
- increased circulation of coined money, and
- growth of urban centres.

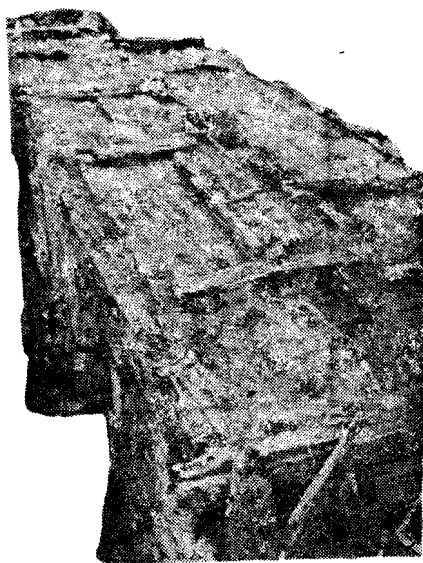
One more important question which deserves our attention is the role of the state in the overall economic activity. We shall therefore examine to what extent the state

intervened in the economy? Did this intervention help the growth of economy or hamper it? Such and related questions would be discussed in the course of this Unit.

19.2 MATERIAL AND SOCIAL BASIS OF PRODUCTION

You read in Block-4 about the use of iron technology in agriculture during the second half of the first millennium B.C. A substantial surplus of agricultural produce was now created. This surplus not only transformed the material basis of society, but also gave rise to new social groups. Many of these new social groups began living in the newly emerging towns.

The Greek writer Arrian stated that it was not possible to record with accuracy the number of cities because of their immense numbers. This can be taken to indicate that there may have been an increase in the number of towns in this period. Descriptions by Megasthenes of the well organised administration of towns indicate large concentration of population in these centres. For living in these towns regulations were apparently stringent. Excavations have however, failed to produce any substantial evidence of city planning in this period and the remains of Mauryan architecture are few. That many of the building structures were made of burnt bricks can be deduced from the fact that they have been found in large quantities from excavations in sites spread over Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Houses were made also of timber because Megasthenes speaks of wooden structures at the Mauryan capital, Pataliputra. At Kumrahar (modern Patna) excavations also revealed some structures which have been identified as a pillared hall of a Mauryan palace. In terms of structures one of the most important finds of this period are a large number of ringwells which were probably used to supply water for domestic purposes. They became widespread in other parts of the country in the subsequent ages. The hallmark of the structural development was thus the extensive use of ringwells and burnt bricks. They imply the easy availability of timber for them to be made. Use of burnt bricks, and finds of Northern Black Polished Ware sherds and other remains help us gauge how widely towns were distributed in several parts of the Mauryan empire. We shall take up these for discussion later in this Unit.



5. Remains of a Wooden Palace (Pataliputra).

In the Ganges Valley the existence of towns with the above mentioned material remains implies a significantly strong technological base. Thus, it has been emphatically argued in the writings of D.D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma that this was provided by the widespread use of iron. It was pointed out in Unit-18 that the Magadhan kingdom was located near the rich iron ore areas of southern Bihar, and had access to important river and land routes. During excavations different types of iron tools like socketed axes, sickles and possibly ploughshares, have been found. These tools must have made the task of clearing the thick forests of the Eastern Ganges Plains easy and also facilitated the efficiency of agriculture. Numerous small heaps of iron slag have been found scattered all over the iron belt of South Bihar. Such refuse material left behind indicates that iron smelting may not have been of a very

high quality. Local furnaces which have been discovered may suggest that ordinary people probably had access to the use and manufacture of iron. Sophisticated techniques of making different kinds of iron were also known, as can be gleaned from the **Arthashastra**.

The use of iron did not, however, diffuse from the Ganges Valley to other parts of the country. Independent evidence for its use and availability has been found in excavated material dated to both pre-Mauryan and Mauryan times in other parts of India as well. However, it is clear that in the Ganges Valley atleast, the soil being heavy and loamy, the necessity of heavy iron tipped ploughs and plough-shares was most essential to make intensive agriculture possible. The use of iron for agricultural purposes cannot be over emphasized. That this was recognised by the State is evident from the **Arthashastra** which advocates that the King should maintain a monopoly over certain kinds of mining. This was perhaps also suggested because of the crucial need of metals for military progress.



6. Ironsmith's Furnance

Apart from sound technology, most expanding agrarian societies require a regular and cheap supply of labour for production of food grains and other commodities. How this labour is controlled and maintained is of crucial importance to understand the social basis of production. We have already indicated above that a new kind of cultivation had become important in the middle Ganges Valley, namely, paddy cultivation. This was labour-intensive and required more than the peasant family's labour at particular seasons of transplanting and harvesting. This kind of cultivation had become popular during this period. We also find that great stress was laid on bringing new land under cultivation. In these newly settled tracts shortage of labour was expected, and from the **Arthashastra** we learn how the State could make special attempts to settle the new areas.

In this context it is suggested that the **sudras** were to settle these areas. They in any case formed the bulk of agricultural and other types of manual labour. Settling new groups could be done by transferring them from overpopulated areas or deporting them from the defeated kingdoms. The latter was probably the case with the 150,000 people who were deported after the Kalinga War. The **Arthashastra** suggests that new villages could be formed also by inducing foreigners to immigrate to them. Other groups like carpenters and merchants were also probably settled in a similar manner. The **sudra** settlers were expected to be given some fiscal concessions and also a supply of cattle and seeds along with implements. This was probably an encouragement to enable them to cultivate virgin soil. Decaying or ruined settlements were similarly to be repopulated because with a rehabilitated settlement only could agricultural production be augmented.

In many cases the newly settled areas formed part of the crown lands, known as the **sita** lands. On occasions they were granted to ex-village officials for cultivation. In these cases the failure on the part of the farmers to cultivate would lead to their transfer to someone else. Since these villages were a part of crown lands, obviously the King and his officials exercised strict control over them.

Thus, during the Mauryan period the two major pre-requisites, namely the use and control of raw materials and manpower made it possible for agrarian expansion to take place. We next turn to take a more detailed look at the material and economic expansion, in particular in the Ganges Valley, and on a general level, in other parts of India under the Mauryas.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Mark which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - a) **Sudras** were employed for large scale agricultural operations. ()
 - b) The use of iron technology helped agrarian expansion to a large extent. ()
 - c) All villages in Mauryan India were under direct state control. ()
- 2) List the material changes that took place in the Ganges Valley under the Mauryas in about four lines.

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- 3) Explain why iron was able to transform the nature of agrarian growth in about two-three lines.

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19.3 AGRICULTURE AND LAND REVENUE

In this section we will discuss the general features of agrarian economy and land revenue organisation.

19.3.1 General Features of Agrarian Economy

In the earlier section we have seen that settlement of permanent villages was recognised in the **Arthashastra** as a method for the expansion of agrarian economy. These settlements ensured a sound and stable resource base for the State to extract taxes and the land tax formed the bulk of it. This process of settlement was called **janapadanivesa**, but the extent of how this was done is not clearly known. According to R.S. Sharma it would be reasonable to presume that most of the Ganges Basin was brought under cultivation in this manner and some efforts may have been made in the outlying areas as well.

Growth of agriculture meant that the cultivator began to assume an increasingly important role. Megasthenes in his account of the Indian society and its division into seven classes mentions the farmers as the second class, next only to the philosophers who are mentioned as the first class and followed by the soldiers who are mentioned as the third class. Though his perception of the division of Indian society was not absolutely correct, the farmers drew his attention because they were numerically a large class devoted to land. The Classical sources specifically mention that the cultivators were without arms. Megasthenes also maintains that the peasants were left untouched during war. This seems difficult to believe as the example of the Kalinga War and the figures quoted in the Asokan inscriptions of those dead and deported must have included a fair number of peasants.

We have already seen that some lands were **sita** or crown lands. In these areas the King's and the State's rights of possession, cultivation, mortgage and sale were naturally superior. Infact, in the **Arthashastra** a **sitadhyaksa** or superintendent of agriculture is mentioned who probably supervised the cultivation works here. These areas were in all probability fertile and suited to high productivity. It is difficult to identify the origin of these State farms. It is possible that their origin lay in large estates owned by individual landowners in pre-Mauryan times. These were also areas where slaves were deployed working under direct State supervision. The advanced

knowledge of agricultural techniques, described in depth in the **Arthashastra**, also probably refer to these lands.

Agriculture in other areas of the Mauryan State, known as **janapada** territories, was in all probability, carried on privately. In the **Jataka** stories there are frequent references to **gahapatis** and **grambhojakas**. These groups are said to have employed hired labourers on land indicating their capacity to do so as a land-owning gentry. In contrast, the labourers are described to be in a pitiable condition and sometimes, slaves are also mentioned. The King could own land in his personal capacity in both **sita** and **janapada** areas though direct references to this for this period are lacking. Thus though it is not possible to discuss the full complexities of the land ownership pattern for the whole of India in detail, for the Ganges Valley alone one can suggest that different types of it existed. This naturally entailed varied systems of cultivations and also different levels of agricultural development. The **Arthashastra** references to different types of agricultural operations supervised by officials thus refer to lands owned by either the State or King. However, a small section of the text deals with the sale of land and buildings. This suggests that individuals could own small areas of cultivable land which they could cultivate themselves.

The most important reason for the success of agriculture in the state owned lands was the facility of irrigation provided by the State. There were rules for the regulation of water supply for the benefit of agriculturists. Megasthenes informs us that a number of officers were employed who measured the land and inspected sluices by which water was distributed into the branch channels. That irrigation facilities existed in other areas as well is indicated by the mention of an irrigation cess amounting to a fifth, a fourth or a third of the produce in the **Arthashastra**. Since this cess was levied only on irrigated soil it can be deduced that the State regulated irrigation facilities in areas where rainfall was scarce. In these areas a regular supply of water could ensure a normal yield of crops. Pushyagupta, one of the governors of Chandragupta Maurya, is said to have built a dam for creating a reservoir of water near Girnar in Saurashtra. This was known as **Sudarshana tadaga** (water tank). This reservoir became so famous that its history can be traced to the middle of the fifth century A.D. for a period of about eight hundred years.

19.3.2 Land Revenue Organisation

The Classical writers state that some villages were exempted from taxation. They were probably rare exceptions and in fact, it has been suggested that this was so because these villages may have provided soldiers to the State. It is also suggested by scholars that in order to bring virgin soil under cultivation in some villages remission of taxes was allowed for a period of time.

The essential resources needed for the Mauryan State could only be got from land revenue. Therefore, the land revenue collection had to be efficiently organised so as to expropriate the maximum possible surplus from the people. It is generally stated that the Mauryan rule constitutes a landmark in the history of the improvement of the system of taxation in ancient India. The Mauryas in fact attached great importance to the assessment of land revenue and the highest officer in charge of this was the **samaharta**. The **sannidhata** was the chief custodian of the State treasury. Since the revenue was also collected in kind, providing storage facilities was also the duty of the latter.

The classical writers mention that $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the produce was paid in tax by the peasants. They also suggest that a tribute was paid by them. Land tax (**bhaga**) was the main item of revenue. According to the texts, it was levied at the rate of $\frac{1}{6}$ th of the produce. But it is possible that in the Maurya period it was quite high and levied at the rate of $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the produce. The Lumbini Edict of Asoka says that when he visited Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, he exempted the village from the payment of **bali** and reduced the payment of **bhaga** to $\frac{1}{8}$. Even Asoka's great respect for the Buddha did not prompt the emperor to exempt the village totally from the payment of taxes.

Sharecropping was another way by which the State collected agricultural resources. The sharecroppers were in the first place provided with seeds, oxen, etc., and received arable land for cultivation. In this kind of situation the peasants probably gave half of the produce to the State.

The above taxes were further supplemented by a large number of customary dues that the peasants had to pay. The Mauryas also introduced some new taxes and made already existing ones more effective. The peasants paid a tax called **pindakara** paid by husbandmen, which was assessed on groups of villages. This was also customary in nature. Often the villages had to supply provisions to the royal army passing through their respective territories and this naturally increased their burden. The exact nature of **hiranya** is also not known, but it was probably a tax paid in cash because **hiranya** literally means gold. **Bali**, the traditionally known levy from the Vedic times, continued under the Mauryas, and all the above taxes which are described by Kautilya in the **Arthashastra** must have burdened the peasantry considerably. Nonetheless, he continues to recommend that in case the State still falls short of its needs, several other fiscal measures for periods of emergency could be made use of. For example one such measure was the levy of **pranaya** which literally meant a gift of affection. This is a tax first mentioned by Panini but elaborated upon for the first time in the **Arthashastra**. It amounted to $\frac{1}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of the produce according to the nature of the soil. It is usually interpreted as a voluntary gift but once put into practice, in reality it must have become obligatory. Further, in times of emergency the cultivators could be forced to raise two crops. The importance of these measures was constantly emphasized as the country did face famines, and during these bleak periods the level of revenue collection must have naturally fallen.

As land revenue was the backbone of the Mauryan economy, the **Arthashastra** is careful in designing the revenue system of the State. It is particular in defining the different types of villages to be taxed as the fertility of soil varied from place to place. There is also attention paid to special categories of revenue collectors and assessors. Undoubtedly then, the Mauryan State, atleast in its major areas, must have ensured a substantial land revenue collection without which the government machinery and the army would have been difficult to maintain.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Match the Sanskrit words in Column I with their equivalent meaning in Column II by ticking the right (✓) answer in the Code given below :

Column I				Column II			
i) Janapadanivesa				A) Landed gentry			
ii) Sitadhyaksa				B) Official in Crown lands			
iii) Gahapati				C) Revenue Assessor			
iv) Samaharta				D) Process of Settlement			
a) I	II	III	IV				
A	B	C	D				
b) I	II	III	IV				
D	E	A	C				
c) I	II	III	IV				
D	B	A	C				
d) I	II	III	IV				
C	B	D	A				

- 2) Tick (✓) which one of the following revenue items was collected only in cash:

- a) kara
- b) bhaga
- c) hiranya
- d) pranaya

- 3) List the fiscal measures which were expected to be adopted by the State during periods of emergency in about five lines.

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- 4) List the main taxes and revenue officials of the Mauryan period.

19.4 TRADE AND TOWNS

The non-agrarian economy of the Magadhan empire revolved around two interrelated developments:

- i) expansion of trade and commerce, and
- ii) establishment of new towns and markets.

The development of the agrarian economy had given a solid economic basis to the Mauryan empire particularly in the Ganges Valley. However, it was the expansion of commercial economy that enabled it to extend its resource base to other parts of the country.

19.4.1 Organisation of Trade

Trade did not suddenly develop during this period. It was part of the larger process of economic change which had begun much before the Mauryan times. The **Jataka** stories have frequent references to caravan traders carrying large quantities of goods to different parts of the country. The security provided by Mauryan rule enabled internal trade to blossom. Major trade routes to West Asia and Central Asia passed through north-west India. The main trade routes in northern Indian were along the river Ganges and the Himalayan foothills. Major centres like Rajagriha in Magadha and Kausambi, near present-day Allahabad, were connected in this way. Pataliputra, the capital of the Mauryas, had a particularly strategic location and was connected by river and road in all four directions. The northern route going to such sites as Sravasti and Kapilavastu was connected through the city of Vaisali. From Kapilavastu this route linked up Kalsi, Hazara and eventually led up to Peshawar. Megasthenes also talks of a land route connecting the north-west with Pataliputra. In the south it was connected to Central India and in the South-east to Kalinga. This eastern route turned southwards to finally reach Andhra and Karnataka. The other part of the eastern route continued down to the Ganges delta to Tamralipti which acted as an exit point for the south and south-east. From Kausambi moving westwards another route led to Ujjain. This continued either further west to the coast of Gujarat or west south across the Narmada and was regarded as **dakshinapatha** (southern route). The overland route to countries of the West went via Taxila near Islamabad.

The opening up of communications in various parts of the Indian sub-continent was the direct result of the expansion of settlements, as it facilitated movement from one place to another. This naturally fostered trade. Internal trade was considerably benefited because river transport had been improved once the forests around the Valleys had been cleared under State initiative. The State's policy particularly under Bindusara and Asoka to have peaceful and friendly relations with the Greeks gave fillip to foreign trade as well.

Trade was carried on in different ways. It was intrinsically linked to the methods of production and its organisation. Primarily in north India craft production was organised on guild (**sreni**) lines. This was so in the pre-Mauryan period as well. Under the Mauryas when the number of artisan groups had increased we find guilds organised in different towns, inhabiting particular sections of them. These guilds generally worked and lived together in a closely knit relationship. Craft was necessarily hereditary and in most cases specialization was handed down from father to son. These guilds became very powerful in the post-Mauryan period as is evident from a number of inscriptions. Megasthenes also mentions the artisans as one of the seven castes/classes he noticed during his stay in India. The well-known guilds of the period were those of metallurgists of various kinds, carpenters, potters,

leatherworkers; painters, textile workers, etc. Making of the Northern Black Polished Ware is a good example of craft activities. It became a specialized kind of pottery-making craft and its availability outside the Ganges Valley is limited. This indicates that it was a technique developed in this part of the country and was perhaps dependent on a particular type of clay available here.

Like the artisans, the merchants were also organised along guild lines. Certain kinds of merchants were connected to particular artisan groups which made distribution of goods easier. They too inhabited identifiable parts of the cities which came to be associated with their professions.

It is however, important to note that the State administration under the Mauryas also took up the organisation of trade. This administrative control on production and distribution made it more efficient. This did not mean that it directly interfered with and changed the guild organisations. On the other hand, it increased its control on the distribution of their goods and itself became a producer. At another level, it gradually converted some crafts into some sort of small-scale industries. The State did this by directly employing some of the artisans like armourers, shipbuilders, builders in stone, etc. They were exempt from payment of tax because they rendered compulsory labour service to the State. Other artisans like spinners, weavers, miners etc., who worked for the State were liable to tax.

The above mentioned steps to organise trade and commodity production were part and parcel of State policy. This policy was aimed at augmenting its efficiency in economic spheres of activity and its revenues. Megasthenes mentions a superintendent of commerce whose duty was to fix prices of goods and also to interfere if there was a glut in any commodity. He is also mentioned in the **Arthashastra** as **panyadhyaksa**. This text lists the various officials that were in charge of the different economic activities. The office of the **samsthadhyaksa** that looked after the markets was infact to check the wrong practices of the traders. The **pautavadhyaksa** or superintendent of weights and measures exerted a strict control on maintaining standard weights and measures. State boats that facilitated transport were put under the charge of a **navadhyaksa**. He helped in regulating river transport and collecting ferry charges. All traders had to pay taxes and custom's dues ranging from $\frac{1}{5}$ th to $\frac{1}{25}$ th of the value of goods. These were supposed to be collected by a superintendent of tolls called the **sulkadhyaksa**.

Where the State produced goods, different categories of officials looked after particular departments. These goods were called **rajapanya**. The State was careful to choose those areas of commodity production and trade that were essential for its functioning and yielded good revenues. Sometimes State goods could also be sold by private traders as their network of distribution was more well-organised and widespread. Despite the above changes it would be right to conclude that the majority of artisans either continued to work individually or within the complex structure of the guilds. The guilds continued to serve the very important purpose of cohesively organising petty producers and most importantly, controlling them. Even the artisans found it advantageous to join them since this eliminated the expenses of working alone or competing with others of the same profession. From the State's point of view the guilds facilitated the collection of taxes. Finally since they concentrated locally and also specialized in particular crafts there was a strengthening of that particular trade. We need however, to conclude with the point that guilds were not found to flourish in all parts of India during this period. Particularly in the extreme South, even in the post-Mauryan period it is difficult to find mention of them. The major pre-requisite for guilds to flourish was of course an urban milieu to which we now turn our attention.

19.4.2 Growth of Urban Economy

The process of urbanism which had begun in the pre-Mauryan period witnessed further growth in the Mauryan period. Two major sections of population inhabited the towns, namely, artisans and merchants and the officials of the government. The urban economy characterised by the activities of the manufacturers of goods and of merchants as also by a system of exchange began to spread from the Ganges Valley to other areas of Western and Central India, the Deccan and South India.

Proliferation of rural settlements and the prosperity of the **gāhapatīs** enabled the social base of urban centres to expand further. In many cases it were the rich rural

families that developed contacts with towns and provided financial support needed particularly by merchant groups.

We introduced this Unit with a discussion on the material remains of the Mauryan phase to show that the urban centres had definitely increased during this period. It is however impossible to measure this growth. Going by Kautilya's **Arthashastra** we learn that through a process of **durganivesa** or **durgavidhana**, the State founded walled towns. These towns were said to be peopled by priests, nobles, soldiers and also merchants, artisans and others. There are also detailed descriptions in this text on the protection of towns and their lay-out so that economic regulations could be carried out properly. Indeed, the **Arthashastra** viewed towns (**durga**), as it viewed the **janapadas**, as an important source of revenue. The taxes received from towns paid rich dividends to the State and therefore, development and administration of towns was given much importance by the Mauryas. In fact, when mention is made of taxing guilds located in the capital or **durga**, we get an impression that those in the countryside enjoyed exemption. This may have been because town population was easier to regulate and organise.

Megasthenes' detailed description of the Mauryan capital gives us some idea about how towns were administered and which areas of urban economy were regulated in the interest of the State. He tells us that Pataliputra was administered by thirty officials who were divided into six Committees of five members each. Of these six Committees four were related to economic activity. These were Committees dealing with industrial arts, trade and commerce, the supervision of the public sale of manufactured goods and the collection of tax on articles sold. The other two Committees were concerned with the welfare of foreigners and the registration of births and deaths. The general administration of law and order in the cities was thus important to ensure the proper functioning of its economic activities.

The above description may apply to other similar big and developed cities in the heartland of the Mauryan Empire. In the absence of enough information it is not possible to describe the exact nature of the administration of small cities, port towns and pilgrimage centres. What is however, important to emphasize is that the development to the Mauryan economy in general made it possible for towns of various kinds to flourish. Population mobility and interaction between social groups was necessary for the urban economy to remain healthy and prosperous. This could be ensured by a certain degree of political stability in the metropolitan and core areas of the empire.

Another significant aspect of the urban economy is that it created the situation for the development of transactions in cash and the circulation of coined money. Though the use of currency began in an earlier period, it became fairly common during the Mauryan period because of the development of commerce. Its use in trade is self-evident but the importance of cash in the economy can be gauged from the fact that it was probably used to pay salaries of the officials. The **Arthashastra** lists for us the range of salaries expected to be paid and this varied from 48,000 **panas** to 60 **panas** annually. For such a powerful cash economy to function the minting of coins and the supply of metals like silver and copper required to do so were of prime importance. That these were harnessed by the Mauryas is evident from the innumerable punch-marked, mostly silver, coins which are assignable to this period. Of these the majority are stated to be from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar which constituted the core area of the empire.

For the kind of urban economy that envisaged substantial State control, the State also had to maintain a monopoly in certain important spheres of activity. Thus, the **Arthashastra** provides for a superintendent of mines called **akaradhyaksa** whose chief function was to look for new mines and reopen old ones. Like mining metals another area of State monopoly was mining salt. The importance of different kind of metals not only for minting coins but for such important commodities as making weapons cannot be underestimated. Thus, we find the mention of a superintendent of iron called **lohadhyaksa** in the **Arthashastra**. Apart from equipping soldiers with arms, the government was probably also concerned about supplying implements for agriculture. The concern for keeping a monopoly over mining and trading in mineral products thus secured for the Mauryan State the most crucial raw materials. Proper utilization of these in turn secured for them a greater return in both agrarian and non-agrarian sectors.

Once economic control of urban centres was established and their administration well-regulated, control over various **janapadas** through these towns also increased. Due to an increase in commercial transactions, the centres of exchange and trade had also increased in number. In the next sub-section we shall discuss the different avenues through which socio-economic changes reached out to different parts of Mauryan India. Again, as in other spheres of economy, the Mauryan control of such centres varied from one region to another.

19.4.3 Socio-Economic Changes in Mauryan India

From the above discussion it appears that the most distinguishing feature of the Mauryan Economy was the emphasis on State control in agriculture, trade and industry. We have shown that it was necessary for the State to levy a variety of taxes. The requirements of resources for the Mauryan State were very high. The taxes realised from the region of Magadha and adjoining areas were not enough to meet this demand. Therefore, attempts were made to control resources in other parts of the country as well. For example, Kalinga, the Karnataka plateau and Western India where Asokan inscriptions are found, were such areas. To regulate certain types of economic activities in such far off regions, the Mauryas worked out different strategies. This depended on the nature of resources the particular region offered. The conquest of Kalinga, for instance, offered control of an agriculturally rich area as well as the control of important trade routes that passed through it to the mineral rich areas of South India. Thus the main motive behind acquiring such regions as Karnataka seems to have been that they were rich in gold and other precious materials.

What about those areas where Mauryan inscriptions are not found? It has been recently argued by Romila Thapar that it is difficult to gauge the political or economic control of the Mauryas in such regions. Northern Deccan, the Punjab and Sind and Rajasthan may be cited as examples of such areas. What is the extent of their influence on the economies of the areas where their presence is indicated? Here it may be suggested that no large scale restructuring was done even in these areas. The main interest of the Mauryas was the exploitation of resources of these areas and they depended on influential sections of population in these areas for doing this. It may be pointed out that most regions outside the Ganges Valley were at different levels of economic development in this period. Because of this uneven development, radical change and restructuring of all these regions was very difficult.

The **Arthashastra** and the inscriptions of Asoka tell us about the tribes (**atavikas**, **aranyakas**) that inhabited the various parts of the empire. They often separated the more developed areas from the less developed areas. Kautilya's advice to the State was to win them over to a settled agrarian life. He devotes a full chapter to how tribes could be systematically broken up and several methods, fair or unfair, were deployed to do this. This was necessary in order that groups of five to ten families could settle down permanently for bringing more land under cultivation. Asoka's attitude towards the tribes was paternalistic, but he too warns them that in case they failed to conform or disobeyed orders of the **Mahamatras**, stern action would be taken against them. Controlling of the forest tribes was important from two points of view:

- i) First, it was necessary for new agrarian settlements to be secure as disturbances from tribes would interrupt their economic development.
- ii) Secondly, trade routes often bordered or passed through tribal regions and these had to be made secure.

It is difficult to have an exact idea of how many tribal groups were thus converted to peasants, but, that the process was encouraged by the State is significant to take note of. Archaeological evidence for many parts of India shows habitation sites that were not fully developed as urban centres during this period. The case of the innumerable megalith sites, especially those dated to the third century B.C. or so, in many parts of the Deccan and South India, indicate simple farming or pastoral communities with only a limited knowledge of craft production.

It was impossible to totally change the cultural pattern of a vast country like India in the third century B.C. but at the same time Mauryan rule did initiate some major changes in the material and socio-economic setting which bore fruits in the subsequent centuries.

Some of these changes may be briefly highlighted. In many areas of the Mauryan empire such as north and west Bengal, Kalinga, the Deccan, and also in the

neighbouring south, the beginning of early historical cultural pattern dated to only Mauryan or post-Mauryan periods. This means that, impressive human settlements like towns and cities in which different social groups lived, use of coins, use of scripts, use of sophisticated objects on a significant scale—all began in these regions only from the Mauryan and post-Mauryan periods. This change in material culture implies that there were not only changes in technology and material life in general but also in social organisations and in ideas. Society started becoming organised in a much more complex manner, resulting in separation between social groups and ultimately in the institution of the State. The fact that we find local states appearing in many of the regions after the Mauryas suggests that the process of major socio-economic change associated with the production of surplus in society began in many parts of India through contact with the important regions of the Magadhan Empire.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Using the words given below fill in the following blank spaces:
 - a) The official in charge of mines was called _____ in the Arthashastra (lohadhyaksha/akaradhyaksha).
 - b) Kautilya lists the salaries of the highest ranking officials as 48,000 _____ (karsapanas/panas).
 - c) The overall supervision of commerce in the cities was the duty of _____ (panyadhyaksha/samathadhyaksha).
 - d) The goods produced by the State were called _____ (durgavidhana/rajapanya).
- 2) Outline in brief the important trade routes in Mauryan India.

.....

- 3) To what extent did the Mauryan State interfere in commodity production and trade? Answer in five lines.

.....

19.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed various aspects related to economic changes in India during the Mauryan period. With the help of recent writings on the subject we have introduced you to the view that the Mauryas did not exert direct economic control in equal measure in all regions of India. Their interest in establishing economic contacts with different parts of the empire essentially varied. In the major regions of the empire, the degree of control was certainly greater and more direct. In this Unit you have studied:

- the material and social basis of production which was fundamental for economic growth,
- the main elements of agrarian expansion and the patterns of land ownership,
- how the State appropriated the agrarian surplus through the levy of various land taxes,
- the dynamics of trade and its organisation and the extent to which the State interfered in this sphere of economic activity, and
- the various aspects of the urban economy and technology.

19.6 KEY WORDS

Cess: Tax.

Classical Sources: Refers to the Greek sources for example the *Indika* of Megasthenes.

Diffusion: Spread from a centre of origin.

Fiscal: Economic and financial measures.

Gahapati: Head of rich land-owning family.

Megalith: Megaliths as a general term refer to burials in which big (**mega**) blocks of stone (**liths**) are used. The megaliths could be of different phases of culture, and even now megaliths are built in some areas of India. In the context of the present Block, the megaliths more specifically relate to the cultures of regions like Vidarbha, the Deccan and the south, where Megalithic culture phase preceded the emergence of early historical culture characterised by the use of permanent structures, cities and towns, use of scripts and coins, and of kingdoms.

Samaharta: Assessor of land revenue.

Sannidhata: Treasurer.

Sedentary: Settled permanently.

Sita Lands: Lands owned/controlled directly by the King.

Varna: Generally translated as 'caste' or 'class' indicating the traditional division of Brahmanical society into four groups.

19.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) ✓ b) ✓ c) ×
- 2) You should write about change in technology, growth in urbanisation, use of bricks in construction, etc. See Sec. 19.2
- 3) You should write how iron was used in making different types of tools which helped in agricultural operations and forest clearance. See Sec. 19.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) c
- 2) c
- 3) You should write about the tax called **pranaya** and growing of more than one crop. See Sub-sec. 19.3.2.
- 4) Read Sub-sec. 19.3.2 and note down the names.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) a) **Akaradhyaksa**^{*}
 b) **panas**
 c) **Panyadhyaksa**
 d) **Rajapanya**
- 2) You should mention the main trade route along the river Ganges and other routes which connected the southern region of the country. See Sub-sec. 19.4.1.
- 3) In your answer you should refer to different regulations of the Mauryan State about craft production and commercial activities like the four committees which regulated economy. See Sub-secs. 19.4.2 and 19.4.3.

UNIT 20 ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISATION AND RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER POWERS

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Background
- 20.3 Central Administration-I
 - 20.3.1 The King
 - 20.3.2 Council of Ministers
 - 20.3.3 City Administration
- 20.4 Central Administration-II
 - 20.4.1 Army
 - 20.4.2 Espionage
 - 20.4.3 Justice and Punishment
 - 20.4.4 Revenue Administration
 - 20.4.5 Public Works
- 20.5 Regional and Local Units of Administration
 - 20.5.1 Provincial Administration
 - 20.5.2 District and Village Level Administration
- 20.6 Relations with Other Powers
- 20.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.8 Key Words
- 20.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

20.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- know about the vast administrative apparatus which the Magadhan empire built up,
- familiarise yourself with its various branches and offices, their powers and functions
- differentiate among forms of administration at various levels,
- know about the importance and role of Army, espionage and the legal process, and
- know about the relations of Mauryas with other powers and about changes in their policy towards these powers.

20.1 INTRODUCTION

By the third century B.C. the Mauryan state with its centre in Magadha was firmly established. It had a vast territory to control and had an administrative apparatus for doing it. This apparatus covered within its range various levels of administration; administration of the core region (Magadha) of the empire, regional centres, peripheral areas, cities, villages and so on. Besides sustaining the King's authority and order, the administration took into its fold a wide range of activities concerning justice, army, espionage, revenue collections, handicrafts, etc. These are the aspects which have been dealt with in this Unit. From a variety of sources like the text of **Arthashastra**, Greek accounts and the Asokan inscriptions we get a fairly good idea of the Mauryan administrative system.

We also discuss in this Unit the relations which the Mauryan rulers maintained with other contemporary powers both in India as well as in foreign countries. But before dealing with these aspects let us discuss the background of the emergence of the Mauryan administrative system.

20.2 BACKGROUND

The Mahajanapada of Magadha had become the centre of a formidable empire by the time of Chandragupta Maurya. Its territories were no more limited to the Ganga Valley as was the case during the 6th century B.C. By the time of Asoka, except for the deep south and remote regions in eastern and north-eastern India, the entire Indian sub-continent was virtually under the control of the Mauryas.

However, it must be noted that during this time:

- there were still extensive forests and regions inhabited by hunter/gatherers,
- there were regions, particularly the Ganga Valley, characterised by surplus agricultural production,
- urban settlements had emerged as centres for trade and craft production activities, and
- the state extracted the surplus and aimed at increasing its revenues.

A variety of reasons had contributed towards the territorial conquests undertaken by Magadha which eventually emerged as an empire. The main reason obviously was the state's desire to increase its revenues. The state's efforts included bringing such lands under its control which produced surplus in order to extract it; imposition of taxes on traders; control over trade routes and mines, etc. For example Asoka's conquest of Kalinga may have been motivated by the desire to control coastal trade in eastern India. Similarly the extension of control to Karnataka may have been motivated by the desire to exploit the gold mines of Kolar.

Thus surplus production, extraction of surplus, its distribution or expenditure necessitated a complex form of administrative system in order to control or ensure various economic, social and political activities at various levels. For example if a strong army was needed to conquer other areas, a strong administration was needed to organise the army and cater to its requirements. Similarly if taxes were to be collected from traders or surplus was to be extracted from producers, an administrative set up was needed not only to frame rules for this but actually carry out the process of extraction. The Mauryan administration carried on its activities in an organised manner and we shall discuss the various aspects related to them.

Broadly speaking we shall discuss the central, provincial and local units of administration along with related aspects.

20.3 CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

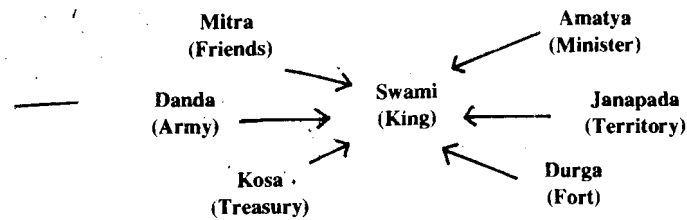
The Mauryan Empire had many major administrative units like the centre and the regions which had various sub-units down to the village. All these units had their own administrative set up but they came under the central authority. The Central administration can be classified under following heads:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| i) The King | v) Espionage network |
| ii) The Council of Ministers | vi) Law and justice |
| iii) City Administration | vii) Public Welfare |
| iv) Army | |

20.3.1 The King

The King was the supreme authority of the state. All basic policy matters as well as crucial decisions were taken by the King. The **Arthashastra** forthrightly mentions that if over an issue the traditional law (**Shashtra**) holds a different point of view from that of the King's law, it was the King's law which prevailed. The Mauryan Empire, in fact, represents a centralised political system under which the monarchy had emerged victorious over the **gana-samghas**. The **Arthashastra** gives final authority to the King in all aspects of administration. It gives the King primacy among the seven

The Seven Components



The argument in favour of King's central position in the **Arthashastra** is because it is the King who:

- appoints or removes the ministers (**Amatyas**),
- defends the treasury and the people,
- works for the progress and welfare of the people,
- punishes the evil, and
- influences the people (**Praja**) through his morality.

But not every one was fit to be a King and the **Arthashastra** also mentions certain necessary virtues for the King like:

- birth in a high family (**uchchakula**),
- capability to keep under control various small kings and officials,
- sharp intellect,
- truthfulness, and
- upholder of **Dharma**, etc.

Not only this but the **Arthashastra** specifies certain subjects which the King should master in order to carry out his functions. He should undergo military training and have knowledge of various departments of economic life (**Vartta**), writing (**Lipi**) etc. The **Arthashastra** further goes on to explain his conduct and daily routine.

The **Arthashastra** also lays down three basic pre-conditions for successful administration of the empire by the King:

- i) he should pay equal attention to all matters,
- ii) he should remain vigilant and active for taking action or corrective measure, and
- iii) he should always discharge his duties.

Besides, he had to be constantly accessible to his advisors and officials. That the King did so is also evident from the account of Megasthenes and from the Asokan edicts.

By the time of Asoka the Mauryan Empire had consolidated its position. An important development in the King's position now was the emergence of a paternal attitude towards his subjects. In the Dhauili inscription Asoka states:

All men are my children and just as I desire for my children that they should obtain welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, the same do I desire for all men.

But in spite of this paternal attitude the monarch was conscious of his absolute authority. For example in the same inscription, addressed to the officials at Tosali and Samsa, he states:

Whatever I approve of, that I desire either to achieve by taking action or to obtain by effective means. and these are my instructions to you.

There is no doubt that Asoka kept the welfare of the people as the prime aim of administration but in terms of political analysis he was an absolute monarch. By adoption of the title **Devanampiya** (beloved of the Gods) Asoka, according to Romila Thapar, made "an attempt to emphasize the connection between kingship and divine power, perhaps even to the degree of excluding the intermediaries, the priests." This, in fact, indicates that the King was now exercising his authority in religious matters also. (See Unit 21)

20.3.2 Council of Ministers

The **Arthashastra** as well as the Asokan inscriptions refer to a Council of Ministers. (**Mantriparishad**). The **Arthashastra** mentions that the work of the state cannot be carried out without assistance. It mentions that "as the chariot cannot move on one wheel hence the King should appoint ministers and listen to their advice". Similarly the Girnar Rock Edicts of Asoka mention about the functions of the Council:

- Rock Edict III implies that the **Parishad** was expected to see that new administrative measures were carried out by different categories of officials.
- Rock Edict VI mentions that the ministers can discuss the King's policy during his absence; suggest amendments; and decide upon any important matter which the King has left to them. Yet the Council had to report its opinion to the King immediately.

The power of the Council might have varied from time to time; yet its primary role remained that of an advisory body. This was because the final authority vested with the King. There was no fixed number of ministers and **Kautilya** mentions that it should be decided according to the needs. But he opined that "a large council is beneficial for the King". He has also listed the issues on which the King should consult his ministers. These included:

- consultation on how to start the works which the state wants to undertake,
- to determine the manpower and finances involved in carrying out these works,
- to determine the areas where the works have to be carried out, and
- finding solutions to deal with calamities, etc.

Kautilya mentions that the work should be carried out according to the majority verdict (**Bhuvyist**) in the council but in case the King feels that the majority verdict will not be able to achieve the goal, he should decide according to his own thinking.

He makes it clear that the "ministers should see to it that the King's orders are carried out properly".

An interesting point mentioned in the **Arthashastra** is the criteria or the qualifications for the appointment of ministers. For example the person should be such as not to be lured by wealth, not to succumb to pressure, etc. i.e., he should be a **Sarvopadashudha** (purest of all). There are also references to an inner council (**Mantrins**) – small group of ministers who would be consulted on issues which needed immediate attention.

We do get references about eighteen departments (**Tirthas**) of the central government in the **Arthashastra**. For example the **Karmantika** looked after the industries, the **Antarvamsika** looked after the King's security and the **Sannidhata** looked after the treasury, etc.

20.3.3 City Administration

Megasthenes has given a vivid description of administration in **Palibothra** (**Patliputra**). This account, though different from that in the **Arthashastra**, helps us in understanding the city administration during this period. In this account the city council was divided into six sub-councils or committees and each committee had five members:

- 1) The first committee looked after industry and crafts. Its functions included inspection of such centres; fixing the wages, etc.
- 2) The second committee looked after the foreigners. Its functions included; arranging for their food, stay and comfort, security, etc.
- 3) The third committee's work was registration of births and deaths.
- 4) Looking after trade and commerce, the functions of the fourth committee included: inspection of weights and measures, controlling the market, etc.
- 5) The fifth committee inspected the manufactured goods, made provisions for their sale and a strict watch was kept to distinguish between new and second-hand goods.
- 6) The sixth committee collected taxes on the goods sold, the rate being 1/10

Interestingly enough, there is no mention of such committees in the **Arthashastra** in spite of the well defined plan of city administration. However, we do find in this planning almost all the functions mentioned by Megasthenes. For example, in **Arthashastra** the functions of the fourth committee are performed by the **Panyadhyaksha**; the collection of taxes (Sixth Committee) was the responsibility of **Sulkadhyaksha** and registration of births and deaths was the work of **Gopa**. The head of the urban administration was called **Nagariaka**. He was assisted by two subordinate officials – **Gopa** and **Sthanika**. Besides these there were a host of officials whose functions have been elaborately defined. For example:

- **Bandhanagaradhyaksha** looked after the jail.
- **Rakshi** i.e. the police, was to look after the security of the people.
- Work in the centres where goods were manufactured was looked after by a host of superintendents like the **Lohadhyaksha**, **Sauvarnika**, etc.

The **Arthashastra** also refers to a variety of activities of city administration, regulations related to them and penalties on their breach. These included:

- Sanitation and water sources
- checking adulteration,
- watch over inns, and
- precautions against fire, etc.

The law enforcers were not above the law. For example in case the **Rakshina** (policeman) maltreated a woman, he had to face severe punishments. At the same time if the citizens broke any of the regulations they were subjected to penalties. For example if any citizen moved out during the curfew hours at night and his explanation for this did not come under the exempted categories, he had to pay a heavy fine. Thus, we can say that the city administration during this period was elaborate and well planned.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark (✓) or (×).
 - a) The state's efforts to increase its revenues contributed towards the expansion of Magadha. ()
 - b) According to **Arthashastra** the Council of Ministers verdict was final before the King. ()
 - c) The adoption of a paternal attitude towards his subjects was a new development in relation to King's attitude in Indian polity. ()
 - d) There is no description of city administration in the account of Megasthenes. ()
 - e) The King was central to the seven components of the state in Kautilya's scheme. ()
- 2) Discuss in about ten lines the relations between the King and the Council of Ministers.

[illegible]

3) Fill in the blanks:

- The Mauryas had a (simple/complex) form of administration.
- By adopting the title **Devanampiya** Asoka tried to
(establish a/delink the) connection between the king and
(earthly/devine) power.
- According to Megasthenes the City Council was divided into
(three/six) sub-committees of (two/five) members each.
- The **Arthashastra** has (elaborately/minutely) defined the functions of various officials.

4) On what basis we can say that the Mauryan city administration was well organised? Write in about ten lines

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20.4 CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION-II

Certain other areas of administration also came under the purview of central administration. However, in some cases like public welfare works, their implementation depended on various local administrative units.

20.4.1 Army

The Nanda kings had a strong army, and it is interesting that the army which Kautilya and Chandragupta had raised to defeat the Nanda King consisted of mercenary soldiers. Both the Greek and Indian literary sources refer to this. Later on the size and organisation of Chandragupta's army became fairly large. For example, according to Pliny's account it consisted of 9000 elephants, 30000 cavalry and 6000 infantry. Plutarch's account refers to 6000 elephants, 80000 horses, 20000 foot soldiers and 8000 war chariots. These accounts may be exaggerated but the retreat of Seleucus, descriptive account of army administration in **Arthashastra** and the violent Kalinga war in Asoka's time point towards a large and well organised military set up under the Mauryas. According to Megasthenes the branches of the army consisted of:

- infantry,
- cavalry,
- elephants,
- chariots,
- transport, and
- admiral of the fleet.

Each branch was looked after by a committee of 5 members. Kautilya has referred to **Chaturangabala** (i.e. infantry, cavalry, chariots and elephants) as the main components of the army – each under a commander. Besides these he also mentions

The officers and soldiers were paid in cash.

Salaries of Army Officers

Senapati	—	48000 Pana
Nayaka	—	12000 Pana
Mukhyas	—	8000 Pana
Adhyakshas	—	4000 Pana

There was a separate department to look after the production and maintenance of a variety of armaments whose chief was known as **Ayudhagaradhyaksha**.

There is a detailed description of the work of various **Adhyakshas**. For example the **Rathadhyaksha** also had to look after the construction of chariots and the **Hastyadhyaksha** looked after the elephant force. The **Arthashastra** also refers to the recruitment policy, war plans and fortifications, etc.

There is no doubt that the state spent a large amount of revenue in maintaining its army, which in the long run might have adversely affected its treasury.

20.4.2 Espionage

The Mauryan administration had a well knit system of espionage. A watch was kept practically on all important officials as well as on general public. The main tasks of the spies recruited involved:

- keeping an eye over the ministers,
- reporting on government officials,
- collecting impressions regarding the feelings of citizens, and
- know the secrets of foreign rulers, etc.

For these activities they would seek the help of various people like cooks, barbers, etc. They would themselves adopt various guises like ascetics, students, etc., to seek information. At times they even directly reported to the King on matters of importance. In fact the **Arthashastra** mentions a well knit system of espionage.

20.4.3 Justice and Punishment

In order to maintain social order, smooth functioning of the administrative system and flow of revenues to the state an orderly legal system was established under the Mauryas. The **Arthashastra** is full of codes listing punishments for various offences. These included a vast range from violation of marriage laws, divorce, murder adulteration, wrong weights, etc. There were various kinds of courts to try the offenders of law or settle disputes at various levels. If the **Gramika** had judicial powers at the village level there were also courts at the level of **Janapada** and the centre. Two kinds of courts are mentioned in the **Arthashastra**:

- 1) **Dharmasthiya** i.e. courts which decided personal disputes.
- 2) **Kantakasodhan** i.e., courts which decided upon matters related to individuals and the state.

For example, the first kind of courts would settle issues related to disputes over **Stridhana** (wife's wealth) or marriages etc., and the second category of courts dealt with wages to workers, conduct of workers, murder, etc. The courts functioned under certain regulations. Cases were properly registered and ample opportunity given to produce witnesses and plead on one's behalf. The sources of law, as mentioned by Kautilya, were:

- 1) **Dharma**,
- 2) **Vyavahara** i.e., current legal codes,

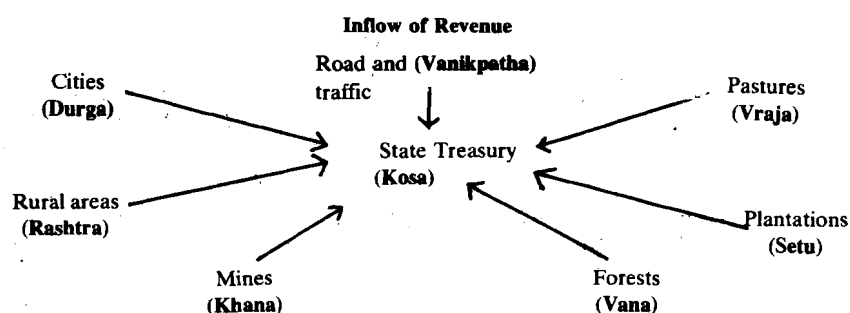
3) **Charitra** i.e., customs, and

4) **Rajasasana** i.e., the royal decree.

The king was the upholder of **Dharma** and held the supreme judicial power. According to Megasthenes the incidence of crime committed in Maurya India was not very high. But the range of punishments mentioned in the **Arthashastra** indicates that breach of laws and crime were not uncommon in the Mauryan social fabric. Hence, the need for a severe Penal code. However, due stress was laid on evidence and the witness. Cases were decided by a "body of arbitrators" with a system of appeal to the king. However, it is worth mentioning here that the penalties in **Arthashastra** were based on **Varna** hierarchies meaning that for the same kind of offence a **Brahmana** was punished much less severely than a **Sudra**.

20.4.4 Revenue Administration

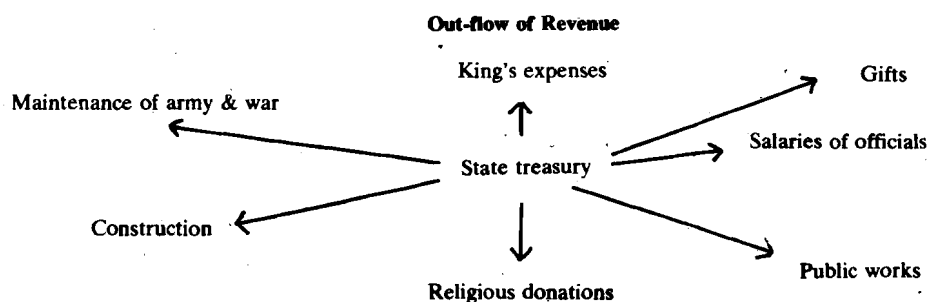
State revenues, during the Mauryan period, were derived from various channels (details have been discussed in Unit-19). Kautilya has listed different resources from where revenue flowed into the state treasury which was looked after by an official **Sannidhata**.



All these resources had their own sources of collection in their areas. For example:

- The cities collected revenues in the form of fines, sales tax (**Sulka**), exercise on sale of liquor, a kind of income tax imposed on the rich, etc. (The **Arthashastra** lists 21 such taxes collected by the **Durga**)
- The revenues from the rural areas were appropriated by the state in the form of income from Crown lands (**Sita**), land revenue (**Bhaga**) from cultivators, taxes on orchards, ferry charges, etc.
- As all the mines were under the control of the state, the mineral wealth was a regular source of income for the state.
- Taxes were levied on merchants travelling by road or water ways.
- Taxes on exports and imports, etc.

There were certain collections made directly by the state from the concerned people. For example, the gamblers had to part with five per cent of their winnings to the state and the merchants had to pay when their weights were tested and certified by the state officials. The state control over armament industry and salt trade increased its revenues. The state was also empowered to impose taxes in case of emergency for increasing its earnings. There were various departments to collect, regulate and manage the state revenues. Most of the revenue collections which went to the state treasury had their outflow in the form of expenditure on army, administration, salaries, king, etc.



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The King had the right of granting remission of land revenue for we find that Asoka had reduced the (**Bhaga**) (state's share in agricultural produce) of the village Lumbini to 1/8 since it was the birth place of Buddha.

20.4.5 Public Works

The Mauryan state took a keen interest in public works. The account of Megasthenes and the **Arthashastra** refer to these works:

- 1) The state took considerable interest in irrigation because it could be a major source of revenue. Megasthenes has mentioned officials who supervised irrigation. In **Arthashastra** also there are references to various modes of irrigation like dams, ponds, canals etc. There were certain regulations regarding the use of water resources and breaking these was a state offence. The state also encouraged people for repairing dams at their own initiative and for this land revenue remissions were granted. In the inscription of Rudradaman (written in the middle of second century A.D.) there is mention of the construction of a water reservoir (**tadaga**) called Sudarsana during Chandragupta's times. This was obviously built to facilitate the supply of water.
- 2) There are a many references to medicine men of various kinds during this period like ordinary physicians (**Chikitsakah**), midwives (**Garbhavyadhi**) etc. From Asokan inscriptions we know that medical treatment and medicines were available to both men and animals.
- 3) The state also helped its citizens during natural calamities like floods, famines, etc.
- 4) The **Arthashastra** mentions that the King should look after orphans, old unattended women, etc. To what extent these were actually carried out we do not know.
- 5) An important aspect of public works was the laying down and repair of roads and opening inns.

Thus, we can say that the state did spend a certain amount from its revenues on public works. This must have increased during the time of Asoka due to his concern for public welfare and paternal attitude towards his subjects.



7. A Cross-section of Roads Excavated at Ujjain.

20.5 REGIONAL AND LOCAL UNITS OF ADMINISTRATION

We know that in the Mauryan state all powers were vested in the **King** and that the core area of the state was characterised by a highly centralised administrative system. But at the same time no administrative control could be effective in a vast empire unless it devised certain administrative means also to control the regional or local levels. After its territorial expansion the Magadha state established administrative control at the provincial and local levels.

20.5.1 Provincial Administration

The head of the Provincial administration was the **Kumara** (royal prince) who used to govern the province as the King's representative. For example Asoka had been the **Kumara** of Ujjayini and Taxila before becoming the King. The **Kumara** was in turn assisted by **Mahamatyas** (**Mahamatras** during Asoka's period) and a council of ministers. From Asokan edicts we get the names of four provincial capitals—Tosali (in the east), Ujjain (in the west), Suvarnagiri (in the south), and Taxila (in the north). Certain areas within the province were administered by governors who may have been minor rulers of the areas. We can say this because the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman mentions Tushaspa, a **yavna**, as a governor of Junagadh area during the time of Asoka. The same inscription, however, says that during Chandragupta Maurya's time his representative in that area was a **vaisya** Pushyagupta.

The council of ministers at the provincial level not only acted as a check on the **Kumara** but at times had direct relations with the King.

Among the senior officials were the **Mahamatras**. The **Arthashastra** mentions them in the sense of ministers where as the Asokan edicts mention them as performing various activities like looking after the border areas, judicial work and **Dhamma Mahamatras** who looked after religion. Their appointment, it appears, could be made both by the King as well as the **Kumara**. Another category of high officials was that of **Amatyas**. This category too must have held special powers for it was against their arbitrary actions that the people of Taxila revolted during the reigns of Bindusara and Asoka.

20.5.2 District and Village level Administration

The administrative units included a set up at the district level consisting of a number of villages and at the same time each village had its own administrative unit.

The officials listed at the level of district during this period were **Pradeshta**, **Rajuka** and **Yukta**, the former being the overall incharge of the district. Their functions included:

- survey and assessment of land,
- tours and inspections,
- revenue collection, and
- maintaining law and order, etc.

At times, the King was in direct touch with these officers. For example in the 4th Pillar Edict Asoka grants to the **Rajukas** "independent authority" to carry out some of his instructions in relation to public welfare. He also vested in them certain powers which they might not have had earlier. The **Yukta** was a junior officer giving secretarial kind of assistance to the other two. There were also checks and balances on the powers of each category of officials.

The Asokan edicts, however, do not throw much light on village level administration. But there are references to this unit of administration in the **Arthashastra**. It appears that the officials at this level were local people appointed and assisted by the villagers. The term mentioned for such officials is **gramika**. The set up at this level must have varied according to local conditions. But we do find **Gopa** and **Sthanika**, two types of officers, acting as intermediaries between the district and village level administrative units. Their functions included:

- demarcating village boundaries,
- maintaining records of lands used for various purposes.

- recording income and expenditure of people, and
- recording taxes, revenues and fines, etc.

But the villages did have a certain amount of autonomy in administering their affairs.

It is clear that the Mauryan state employed a large number of officials at all levels of administration. An important aspect worth noting for this period is the payment of salaries in cash. We have references to a commander-in-chief receiving 48,000 **panas**, a soldier receiving 500 **panas** and a labourer 60 **panas**. This indicates the predominance of money economy and at the same time tremendous burden on the state treasury. This perhaps explains the obsession in the **Arthashastra** with the problem of extracting and generating revenues and taxes — from land revenue to tax on gambling, etc.

Check Your Progress 2

- Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark (✓) or (×)
 - The Mauryan state spent a huge amount on the maintenance of army. ()
 - The Mauryas had no system of espionage. ()
 - During this period there were certain rules and regulations for the functioning of courts. ()
 - The King had no right to grant revenue remissions. ()
 - The state spent money for public welfare. ()
- Fill in the blanks.
 - The provincial administration was headed by _____ (**Amatya/Kumara**).
 - At the village level judicial powers were vested in _____ (**Pradeshta/Gramika**).
 - State control over mines _____ (decreased/increased) its sources of revenue.
- Discuss in about ten lines the sources of revenue and expenditure of the Mauryan state.

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- List in five lines the main features of village administration.

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20.6 RELATIONS WITH OTHER POWERS

From the time of Chandragupta till the Empire came to an end we can divide the foreign relations of the Mauryas into two distinct phases :

- i) the initial phase or the phase of expansion
- ii) the latter phase or the phase of consolidation,

We have a variety of sources which give information in this regard. The Asokan inscriptions, for example, mention contemporary rulers in other parts of the world.

The initial phase was marked by a policy of securing trade routes and subjugating the Greek settlements in the north and north-west regions. You have already read in Unit 18 about the encounter between Chandragupta Maurya and Seleucus. It appears that after this the Mauryas did not face trouble from that frontier. The incorporation of central India gave them control over **Dakshinapatha** and brought them into the peninsula. It can be said that with the Kalinga War the initial phase of expansion came to an end. However, it is evident that this phase was marked by an aggressive foreign policy. It was through war and subjugation that hostile regions were brought under control.

Once the Mauryan expansion reached its limits the emphasis shifted to consolidation and having friendly relations not only with immediate neighbours but with far-off countries. But it has to be noted that the relations which the Mauryas established with other powers were based on diplomatic requirements, geographical proximity and trade needs.

Contacts had been established with the western world and during the times of Bindusara there was a regular exchange of messengers, Strabo's account mentions Demetrius as a successor to Megasthenes in the Mauryan court. These friendly relations are also demonstrated from the account of Athenaeus which mentions the Indian King's request of sending wine, figs and philosopher. In Rock Edict XIII Asoka has referred to five contemporary rulers:

- Antiyoka (Antiochus II of Syria)
- Turmaya (Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt)
- Antikini (Antigonos of Macedonia)
- Maka (Magas of Cyrene), and
- Aliksudaro (Alexander of Epirus).

The reference to these rulers is in the context of **dhammavijaya** (victory by **Dhamma**) indicating that missions were sent to these rulers with the message of **Dhamma**. These missions must have successfully established friendly contact for the Edict mentions that the greatest victory i.e., victory by **Dhamma** had been achieved in these regions. But we must also remember here that by this period regular trade was carried with the Western world and the kind of exchanges that took place not only affected various cultural aspects but also laid the foundations for new schools of art and architecture. (You will read more about it in Block-6).

The relations of the Mauryas with the powers in the south seems to have been cordial. No Asokan inscriptions have been discovered so far in the regions ruled by Cholas, Pandyas, Keralputras and Satyaputras — the major independent powers in the south. But Rock Edict XIII mentions about **Dhammavijaya** in these regions too. This further strengthens the argument about friendly relations and consolidation. Sri Lanka remained another friendly neighbour again due to the policy of **Dhamma**.

Thus we see a marked shift in the relations of the Mauryas with other powers i.e., from a policy of expansion and subjugation to a policy of friendship and moral conquest characterised by absence of military conquests.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Discuss the various phases in the relations of Mauryas with other powers. Answer in about 10 lines.

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- 2) List the names of Yavana rulers mentioned in RE XIII.

20.7 LET US SUM UP

We have seen in this Unit that the Mauryan administrative set up was highly organised at the central level. All powers were vested in the King but the council of ministers assisted him in various matters. The powers and functions of various officials were well defined and the **Arthashastra** mentions their qualifications also. A unique feature was the emergence of a paternal attitude of the monarchy at the time of Asoka and the various kinds of public works undertaken by the state.

The state not only paid attention for surplus production but organised the methods to successfully extract the surplus. The administrative units at the levels of province, city or village were a part of this process. The taxation system was well regulated but the state spent a huge amount on army and salaries of various officials. Though the Mauryas had built up their administrative system on systems prevalent earlier they certainly brought about certain new administrative elements to strengthen the empire.

The Mauryan foreign relations went through two phases of expansion and consolidation. Once expansion reached its limits through a policy of war and subjugation, the emphasis shifted to consolidation through friendly relations.

20.8 KEY WORDS

Dhammavijaya: a concept introduced by Emperor Asoka. The emphasis was on the principle of non-violence and victory through peaceful and non-violent measures.

Espionage: spy system.

Vice-royalties: administrative units under the jurisdiction of a Viceroy appointed by the King.

20.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) ✓
b) ×
c) ✓
d) ×
e) ✓
- 2) Your answer should include the powers of the council and how the King restricted them. The Council was an advisory body and the King was not under any compulsion to follow its advice. See Sub-sec. 20.3.2.

- 3) a) Complex
b) Establish a; divine
c) Six; five
d) Elaborately
- 4) You should base your answer on the account of Megasthenes and its comparison with Arthasastra. See Sub-sec. 20.3.3.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) a) ✓
b) ×
c) ✓
d) ×
e) ✓
- 2) i) **Kumara**
ii) **Gramika**
iii) Increased
- 3) Base your answer on Sub-sec. 20.4.4.
- 4) Mention the autonomous aspect of village administration and the functions of officials at this level. See Sub-sec. 20.5.2.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) You should mention and elaborate upon the two phases of expansion and consolidation. See Sec. 20.6
- 2) These are : Antiochus II of Syria
Ptolemy II of Egypt
Autigonas of Macedonia
Magas of Cyrene, and
Alexander of Epirus

UNIT 21 ASOKA'S POLICY OF DHAMMA

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Historical Background
 - 21.2.1 Socio-Economic Background
 - 21.2.2 Religious Conditions
 - 21.2.3 Polity
- 21.3 Distribution of Inscriptions
- 21.4 **Dhamma** – Causes
- 21.5 Contents of **Dhamma**
- 21.6 Asoka's **Dhamma** as State Policy
- 21.7 **Dhamma** – Interpretations
- 21.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.9 Key Words
- 21.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

21.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit deals with Asoka's Policy of **Dhamma**. After reading this Unit you will be able to understand:

- the historical background of the formulation of the policy of **Dhamma**,
- the way **Dhamma** figures prominently in Asokan Edicts,
- the essence of Asoka's policy of **Dhamma** as explained by him and as manifested in his welfare activities, paternal attitude, etc.,
- the distinction between Asoka as an individual—a believer in Buddhism and Asoka as an emperor initiating a state policy, and
- the various means employed by Asoka to propagate his policy of **Dhamma**—the role of the **Dhamma mahamatras**.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

Asoka Maurya, succeeded to the Mauryan throne around 269 B.C. Many historians consider him as one of the greatest kings of the ancient world. His policy of **Dhamma** has been a topic of lively discussion among scholars. The word **Dhamma** is the Prakrit form of the Sanskrit word **Dharma**. **Dhamma** has been variously translated as piety, moral life, righteousness and so on, but the best way to understand what Asoka means by **Dhamma** is to read his edicts. The edicts were written primarily to explain to the people throughout the empire the principles of **Dhamma**. This is why most of the edicts have something or the other to say about **Dhamma**, about how keen Asoka was that his subjects should practise **Dhamma** and how keen he was that the affairs of the state too were carried out according to the principles of **Dhamma**. To make principles of **Dhamma** accessible and understandable to all, he put up edicts or inscriptions at the important points throughout the empire and sent messengers of **Dhamma** outside the empire.

It must be clearly understood that **Dhamma** was not any particular religious faith or practice; so we should not translate **Dhamma** (or its Sanskrit equivalent **Dharma**) as religion. It was also not an arbitrarily formulated royal policy. **Dhamma** related to norms of social behaviour and activities in a very general sense and in his **Dhamma** Asoka attempted a very careful synthesis of various norms which were current in his time. To understand why and how Asoka formulated **Dhamma** and what he meant by it, one has therefore to understand the characteristics of the time in which he lived and to refer to Buddhist, Brahmanical and various other texts where norms of social behaviour are explained.

21.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To understand the various aspects of the policy of **Dhamma** and the reasons for its formulation we would necessarily need to sketch the historical background against which it became possible for Asoka to enunciate it. In the next three sub-sections we shall deal with this historical background.

21.2.1 Socio-economic Background

The Mauryan period witnessed a change in the economic structure of the society. With the use of iron, resulting in surplus production, a changeover took place from a simple rural economy to a pattern of economy in which cities and towns also played an important part. It has been generally argued that the use of the Northern Black Polished Ware Pottery is an indicator of material prosperity of the period. The use of Punch-marked silver coins and some other varieties of coins, the conscious intervention of the State to safeguard trade routes and the rise of urban centres point to a structural change in the economy requiring necessary adjustments in the society. The commercial classes had also come to the forefront. The emergence of urban culture by its very logic demanded a more flexible social organisation. The incorporation of tribes and peoples from the outlying areas into the social fabric also presented a problem.

The response of the Brahmanical social order based on the four-fold **varna** division was to make the caste system more rigid and deny a higher status to the commercial class. The rigidity of the Brahmanical class sharpened the division within the society. The lower orders turned to the various heterodox sects and this created social tensions. It was this situation which emperor Asoka inherited when he ascended the Mauryan throne.

21.2.2 Religious Conditions

The Brahmanical hold over society, assiduously built through the later Vedic period, was coming under increasing attack. The privileges of the priests, the rigidity of the caste system and the elaborate rituals were being questioned. The lower orders among the four castes began to favour the new sects. The Vaisyas who were technically included in the higher category were treated as inferior to both Brahmanas and Kshatriyas. The opposition of the commercial class to Brahmanism was to give a filip to the other sects of the society.

Buddhism began as a schismatic movement from the more orthodox outlook of Brahmanism. Its basic tenet was an emphasis on misery and advocacy of the "middle path". It was a set of ethical principles. Buddhism opposed the dominance of the Brahmanas and the concept of sacrifices and rituals. It thus appealed to the lower orders and to the emerging social classes. The human approach to relations in society preached by Buddhism further attracted different sections to Buddhism.

21.2.3 Polity

You have already read that the **Mahajanapadas** of the sixth century B.C., marked the beginning of the state system in many parts of India. This means that only a small section of society came to have monopoly of power which they exercised over the rest of the society in various ways and for various purposes. There were monarchies in which the King was the supreme authority and there were **gana-samghas** in which the rulers were a group of hereditary **Kshatriyas** or member of a clan. By the time, Asoka ascended the throne, the state system, over a period of more than two hundred years, had grown very elaborate and complex. It was characterized by:

- The political supremacy of one region (Magadha) over a vast territory which comprised many previous kingdoms, **gana-samghas** and areas where no organised states had existed before.
- Existence, within this vast territory, of various geographical regions, cultural areas, and of different faiths, beliefs and practices.
- Monopoly of force by a ruling class of which the emperor was the supreme head.
- Appropriation of a very substantial quantity of surplus from agriculture, commerce and other sources.

- Existence of an administrative apparatus.

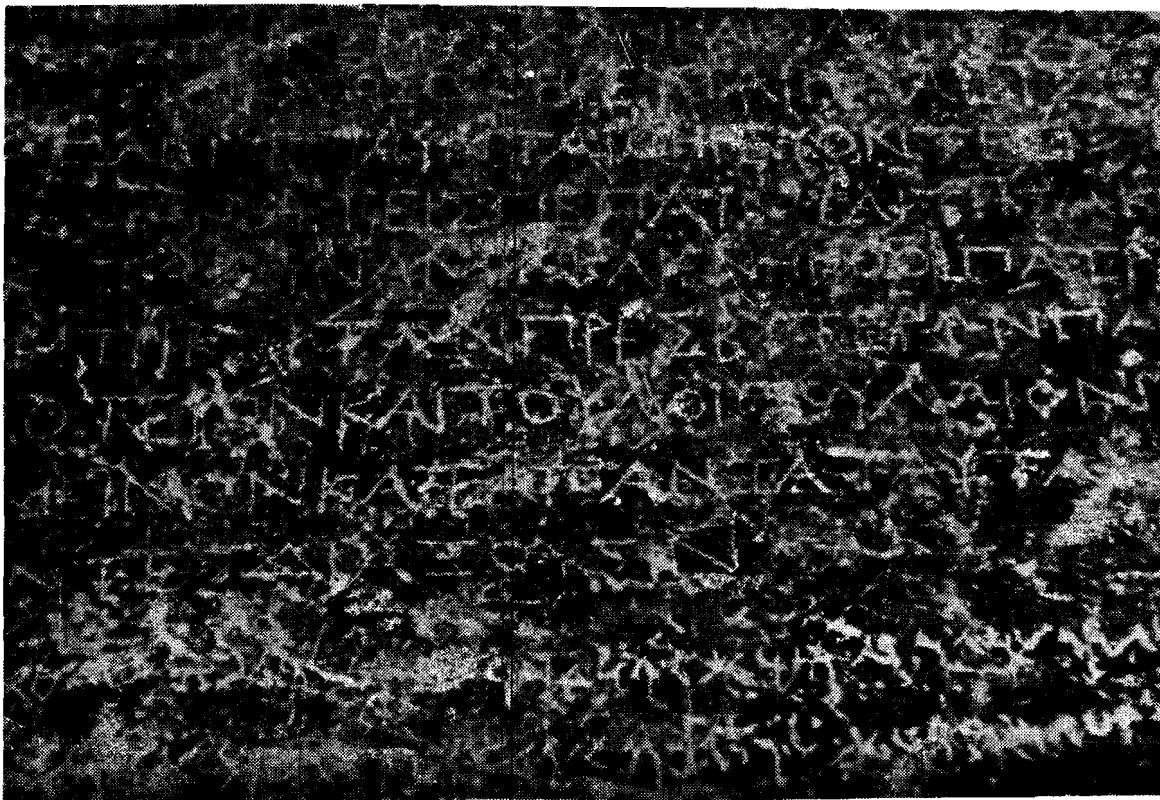
The complexity of the state system demanded an imaginative policy from the emperor which required minimal use of force in such a large empire having diverse forms of economy and religions. It could not have been controlled by an army alone. A more feasible alternative was the propagation of a policy that would work at an ideological level and reach out to all sections of the society. The policy of **Dhamma** was such an endeavour.

21.3 DISTRIBUTION OF INSCRIPTIONS

Asoka used the medium of his Edicts to expound the policy of **Dhamma**. Study the map given in Unit 18 of this block. It shows to you the distribution of Asoka's inscriptions of various kinds such as:

- Major Rock Edicts
- Minor Rock Edicts
- Pillar Edicts and so on.

Asoka engraved his views about **Dhamma** on these edicts which were meant to be read by people of various areas. In doing so, Asoka was trying to establish direct communication with his subjects. These inscriptions were written in different years of his rule. An examination of the principles as expressed in them would give us a clear idea of what Asoka meant by **Dhamma**.



8. An Asokan Inscription (Kandhar)

The inscriptions can be divided into two categories. The smaller group of these inscriptions reveal that the king was a follower of Buddhism and were addressed to the Buddhist Church or the **Samgha**. In these there is declaration of Asoka's own relationship with the Buddhist order. In one of the inscriptions he mentions by their title some of the scriptures with which all Buddhists should be familiar with.

Inscriptions of the other category are known as the Major and Minor Rock Edicts which were inscribed on rock surfaces. It included also the Pillar Edicts inscribed on specially erected pillars.

All sites of Asokan inscriptions were chosen carefully to ensure that they were accessible to a large number of people. Thus, as has been pointed out, these edicts

may be described as proclamations to the public at large. They explain the idea of **Dhamma**. We must make a distinction between Asoka's policy of **Dhamma** which stressed on social responsibility and Asoka's own commitment as a Buddhist. There has been a tendency in the past amongst historians to study the policy of **Dhamma** and Asoka as a Buddhist in the same context, without making any distinction. A careful examination of the inscriptions would suggest that Asoka on the one hand declared his personal association with the Buddhist order and on the other he tried to teach, through the policy of **Dhamma**, the importance of social responsibility and toleration amongst different members of the society. We will discuss this in detail in the subsequent sections.

21.4 DHAMMA – CAUSES

In examining the causes for the policy of **Dhamma**, we have already outlined the historical background, earlier in this Unit. We have suggested that the policy of **Dhamma** was an earnest attempt at solving some of the problems that a complex society faced. However, the policy was nurtured in the mind of Asoka and through it he attempted to resolve some of the tensions within the society. Asoka's private beliefs and his own perceptions of how he should respond to the problems of his empire were responsible for the formulation of the policy of **Dhamma**. It is necessary for us to understand the immediate social environment in which Asoka grew up as it influenced him in the later years of his life.

The Mauryan kings are known to have adopted an eclectic outlook. Chandragupta took recourse to Jainism in his later years and Bindusara favoured the Ajivikas. Asoka himself adopted Buddhism in his personal life, though he never imposed Buddhism on his subjects. Before studying the actual contents of **Dhamma** let us briefly recapitulate the main points of the overall situation that shaped a policy such as this:

- By the time Asoka ascended the throne the Mauryan imperial system had become a complex phenomenon. The imperial system encompassed various cultures, beliefs and social and political patterns. Asoka had to either maintain the structure by force, which would incur tremendous expenses, or to define a set of social norms which would be acceptable to all, cutting across all social practices and religious beliefs. Asoka found his answer in the policy of **Dhamma**.
- Asoka was aware of the tensions which the rise of heterodox sects like Buddhism, Jainism and Ajivikism had generated in society. They were all opposed to the domination of the Brahmanas in some way or the other and had a growing number of supporters. But Brahmanas continued to have strong hold on society and some measure of hostility was inevitable. It was essential to bring about a climate of harmony and mutual trust in a situation such as this.
- There were obviously many areas within the empire where neither Brahmanical system nor following of the heterodox sects prevailed. Asoka himself refers to the country of the **Yavanas** where neither Brahmanical nor Sramanical culture was in vogue. Besides, there were many tribal areas in the empire where people were obviously not familiar either with Brahmanical or heterodox ideas. To make the empire survive and to bring some measure of cohesion within the empire in the midst of such diversity it was essential that there should be some common pattern of behaviour and common approach to the problems of society.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss briefly the historical background against which the policy of **Dhamma** formulated. Your answer should not exceed 15 lines.

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2) Mark right (✓) or wrong (×) against the following statements.

- i) Asoka used the medium of Edicts to expound his policy of **Dhamma**. ()
- ii) Asoka aimed at promoting Buddhism through the policy of **Dhamma**. ()
- iii) The Pillar Edicts were inscribed on specially erected pillars. ()

3) What were the social tensions that the policy of **Dhamma** aimed at resolving? Explain in five lines.

21.5 CONTENTS OF DHAMMA

The principles of **Dhamma** were so formulated as to be acceptable to people belonging to different communities and following any religious sect. **Dhamma** was not given any formal definition or structure. It emphasised on toleration and general behaviour. **Dhamma** stressed on dual toleration—it emphasised on toleration of people themselves and also on toleration of their various beliefs and ideas. There is a stress on the notion of showing consideration towards slaves and servants; there is stress also on obedience to elders; generosity towards the needy, Brahmanas and Sramanas, etc. Asoka also pleaded for tolerance of different religious sects in an attempt to create a sense of harmony.

The policy of **Dhamma** also laid stress on non-violence. Non-violence was to be practised by giving up war and conquests and also as a restraint on the killing of animals. However, Asoka realized that a certain display of his political might may be necessary to keep the primitive forest tribes in check.

The policy of **Dhamma** also included certain welfare measures, like planting of trees, digging of wells, etc. Asoka attacked ceremonies and sacrifices practised regularly on various occasions as meaningless. A group of officers known as the **Dhamma mahamattas** were instituted to implement and publicise the various aspects of **Dhamma**. Asoka thrust a very heavy responsibility on them to carry his message to the various sections of the society. However, they seem gradually to have developed into a type of priesthood of **Dhamma** with great powers and soon began to interfere in politics as well.

In order to make all these aspects of **Dhamma** clearer, we will see how the policy chronologically developed by examining the contents of some of the Edicts.

Major Rock Edict I declares prohibition of animal sacrifice and holiday of festive gatherings.

Major Rock Edict II relates to certain measures of social welfare which are included in the working of **Dhamma**. It mentions medical treatment for men and animals, construction of roads, wells, tree planting, etc.

Major Rock Edict III declares that liberality towards Brahmanas and Sramanas is a virtue, respect to mother and father, etc are all good qualities.

Major Rock Edict IV is a very important statement of the policy of **Dhamma**. The edict comments that due to the policy of **Dhamma** the lack of morality and disrespect towards Brahmanas and Sramanas, violence, unseemly behaviour to friends, relatives and others and evils of this kind have been checked. The killing of animals to a large extent was also stopped.

Major Rock Edict V refers to the appointment of **Dhamma-mahamattas** for the first time in the twelfth year of his reign. These special officers were appointed by the king to look after the interests of all sects and religions and spread the message of **Dhamma** in each nook and corner of the society. The implementation of the policy of **Dhamma** was entrusted in their hands.

Major Rock Edict VI is an instruction to **Dhamma-mahamattas**. They are told that they could bring their reports to the king at any time, irrespective of whatever activity he may be engaged in. The second part of the Edict deals with speedy administration and transaction of smooth business.

Major Rock Edict VII is a plea for toleration amongst all the sects. It appears from the edict that tensions among the sects were expressed intensely, perhaps in open antagonism. The plea is part of the overall strategy to maintain unity.

Major Rock Edict VIII states that **Dhammayatras** (tours) would be undertaken by the emperor. The earlier practice, of the emperor, of going out on hunting expeditions was given up. **Dhammayatras** enabled the emperor to come into contact with various sections of people in the empire.

Major Rock Edict IX attacks ceremonies performed after birth, illness, marriage and before setting out for a journey. A censure is passed against ceremonies observed by wives and mothers. Asoka instead lays stress on the practice of **Dhamma** and uselessness of ceremonies.

Major Rock Edict X denounces fame and glory and reasserts the merits of following the policy of **Dhamma**.

Major Rock Edict XI is a further explanation of the policy of **Dhamma**. Emphasis is on respect to elders, abstaining from killing animals, and liberality towards friends.

Major Rock Edict XII is again an appeal towards toleration among sects. This edict reflects the anxiety the king felt due to the conflict between sects and carries his plea for harmony.

Major Rock Edict XIII is of paramount importance in understanding the Asokan policy of **Dhamma**. The Rock Edict pleads for conquest by **Dhamma** instead of War. This is a logical culmination of the thought processes which began from the first Rock Edict, and by conquest what is perhaps meant is the adaptation of the policy of **Dhamma** by a country, rather than its territorial control. The text of the Edict reads:

"When he had been consecrated eight years the Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi, conquered Kalinga. A hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, a hundred thousand were killed and many times that number perished. Afterwards, now that Kalinga was annexed, the Beloved of the Gods very earnestly practised **Dhamma**, desired **Dhamma** and taught **Dhamma**. On conquering Kalinga the Beloved of the Gods felt remorse, for, when an independent country is conquered the slaughter, death, and deportation of the people is extremely grievous to the Beloved of the Gods, and weighs heavily on his mind. What is even more deplorable to the Beloved of the Gods is that those who dwell there, whether Brahmins, Sramans, or those of other sects, or householders who show obedience to their superiors, obedience to mother and father, obedience to their teachers and behave well and devotedly towards their friends, acquaintances, colleagues, relatives, slaves and servants—all suffer violence, murder and separation from their loved ones. Even those who are fortunate to have escaped, and whose love is undiminished (by the brutalizing effect of War), suffer from the misfortunes of their friends, acquaintances, colleagues and relatives. This participation of all men in suffering weighs heavily on the mind of the Beloved of the Gods. Except among the Greeks, there is no land where the religious orders of Brahmins and Sramans are not to be found, and there

is no land anywhere where men do not support one sect or another. Today, if a hundredth or a thousandth part of those people who were killed or died or were deported when Kalinga was annexed were to suffer similarly, it would weigh heavily on the mind of the Beloved of the Gods."

"This inscription of **Dhamma** has been engraved so that any sons or great grandsons that I may have should not think of gaining new conquests, and in whatever victories they may gain should be satisfied with patience and light punishment. They should only consider conquest by **Dhamma** to be a true Conquest, and delight in **Dhamma** should be their whole delight, for this is of value in both this world and the next."

This is Asoka's testament against war. It graphically depicts the tragedy of war and shows why he turned against it. It is a unique event in the annals of the ancient world because we do not know of any other contemporary monarch who renounced war. Asoka embarked on the policy of **Dhamma** after this war.



9. Rock Edict of Asoka (Gujarra).

21.6 ASOKA'S DHAMMA AND THE MAURYAN STATE

Asoka's **Dhamma** was not simply a collection of high sounding phrases. He very consciously tried to adopt it as a matter of state policy for he declared that "All men are my children" and 'whatever exertion I make, I strive only to discharge the debt that I owe to all living creatures'. It was a totally new and inspiring ideal of kingship. In the **Arthashastra** the King owed nothing to anyone. His only job was to rule the state efficiently.

Asoka renounced war and conquest by violence and forbade the killing of many animals. Asoka himself set the example of vegetarianism by almost stopping the consumption of meat in the royal household. Since he wanted to conquer the world through love and faith, he sent many missions to propagate **Dhamma**. Such missions were sent to far off places like Egypt, Greece, Sri Lanka, etc. The propagation of **Dhamma** included many measures for people's welfare. Centres for the medical treatment of men and beasts were founded inside and outside the empire. Shady groves, wells, fruit orchards and rest houses were laid out. This kind of charity work was a radically different attitude from the king of **Arthashastra** who would not incur any expenses unless they brought more revenues in return.

Asoka also prohibited useless sacrifices and certain forms of gatherings which led to waste and indiscipline and superstition. As mentioned earlier, in order to implement these policies he recruited a new cadre of officials called **Dhammamahamattas**. Part of this group's duties was to see to it that people of various sects were treated fairly. Moreover they were especially asked to look after the welfare of prisoners. Many convicts who were kept in fetters after their sentence had expired, were to be released. Those sentenced to death were to be given a grace for three days. Asoka also started **Dhamma yatras**. He and his high officials were to tour the country in order to propagate **Dhamma** and establish direct contact with his subjects. It was because of such attitudes and policies that modern writers like Kern called him "a monk in a king's garb."

21.7 DHAMMA – INTERPRETATIONS

The Asokan policy of **Dhamma** has been an issue of intense controversy and debate amongst scholars. Some scholars have suggested that Asoka was a partisan Buddhist and have equated **Dhamma** with Buddhism.

It has also been suggested that it was the original Buddhist thought that was being preached by Asoka as **Dhamma** and later on certain theological additions were made to Buddhism. This kind of thinking is based on some Buddhist chronicles. It is believed that the Kalinga war was a dramatic turning point where Asoka out of remorse for the death and destruction of war, decided to become a Buddhist. The Buddhist records also credit him with the propagation of Buddhism in India and abroad. One cannot, however, lay the charge of being partisan against Asoka. There are two strong arguments to prove that Asoka, as an emperor, did not favour Buddhism at the expense of other religious faiths.

- i) Asoka's creation of the institution of the **Dhammamahamattas** convincingly proves that Asoka's **Dhamma** did not favour any particular religious doctrine. Had that been the case, then there would have been no need for such an office, as Asoka could have utilized the organisation of **Samgha** to propagate **Dhamma**.
- ii) A careful study of the Rock Edicts depicts that Asoka wanted to promote tolerance and respect for all religious sects and the duty of the **Dhammamahamattas** included working for the Brahmanas and the Sramans.

These two points made it clear that the policy of **Dhamma** was not the policy of a heretic but a system of beliefs created out of different religious faiths.

There has been some discussion among historians about the results of Asoka's propagation of **Dhamma**. Some historians believe that Asoka's banning of sacrifices and the favour that he showed to the Buddhists led to a Brahmanical reaction. This in turn led to the decline of the Mauryan empire. Others believe that the stopping of wars and emphasis on non-violence crippled the military might of the empire. This led to the collapse of the empire, after the death of Asoka.

It has been shown by Romila Thapar that Asoka's **Dhamma**, apart from being a superb document of his essential humaneness was also an answer to the socio-political needs of the contemporary situation. That it was not anti-Brahmanical is proved by the fact that respect for the Brahmanas and Sramans is an integral part of his **Dhamma**. His emphasis on non-violence did not blind him to the needs of the state. Thus, addressing the forest tribes he warns them that although he hates to use coercion he may be required to resort to force if they continue to create trouble. By the time Asoka stopped war, the entire Indian sub-continent was under his control. In deep south he was on friendly terms with the Cholas and Pandyas. Sri Lanka was an admiring ally. Thus, Asoka's no to war came at a time when his empire had reached its natural boundaries. The plea for tolerance was a wise course of action in an ethnically diverse, religiously varied and class divided society. Asoka's empire was a conglomerate of diverse groups. There were farmers, pastoral nomads and hunter-gatherers, there were Greeks, Kambojas and Bhojas and hundreds of groups having divergent traditions. In this situation a plea for tolerance was the need of the hour. Asoka tried to transcend the parochial cultural traditions by a broad set of ethical principles.

Asoka's **Dhamma** could not survive him. As such it was a failure. However, we should remember that he was not establishing a new religion. He was simply trying to impress upon the society the need for ethical and moral principles.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Explain in ten lines the main principles of the policy of **Dhamma**.

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- 2) Take a map of India and mark the following places where Edicts have been located.
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|---------------|--------------|
| a) Brahmagiri | d) Kalsi |
| b) Dhauili | e) Gujarrar |
| c) Girnar | f) Allahabad |
- 3) What is the importance of the Rock Edict XIII in the understanding of the policy of **Dhamma**? Explain in ten lines.
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- 4) State whether the following statements are True (✓) or False (×).
- | | |
|---|-----|
| i) The fifth Rock Edict introduces the institute of Dhammamahamattas . | () |
| ii) The policy of Dhamma was an attempt at founding a new religion. | () |
| iii) Dhamma preached total non-violence. | () |

21.8 LET US SUM UP

Our sources of information about Asoka's **Dhamma** are his inscriptions on the basis of which we can say that Asoka preached non-violence, toleration and social responsibility. He followed these precepts in his administrative policy. It has to be noted that **Dhamma** cannot be equated with Buddhism. It was a set of principles gleaned from various religious traditions and was implemented to hold the empire together.

21.9 KEY WORDS

Anusamyana: Asoka refers Major Rock Edict III to **anusamyana** or 'tours of inspection' which some categories of officials had to undertake once every five years for expounding **Dhamma** and for official work.

Commercial classes : Section of society engaged in the activity of trade and exchange as distinct from those who are engaged in activities of production.

Dhammayatras: Asoka's predecessors used to **vihara-yatras** for hunting and other royal pleasures. After his visit to Bodhgaya Asoka gave up **vihara-yatras** and took up **dhammayatras**. **Dhammayatras** or 'excursions of **Dhamma**' gave him opportunities to expound **Dhamma** and come into direct contact with different sections of people to spread the ideas of **dhamma**.

Eclectic: Borrowing freely from diverse ideas and philosophies.

21.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sec. 21.2 and Sub-secs. 21.2.1 to 21.2.3. Your answer should broadly cover the new social, economic and political conditions which gave rise to the need felt by the state for a new ethical principle.
- 2) i) ✓ ii) × iii) ✓
- 3) See Sec. 21.4. Your answer could perhaps keep in mind varied and different kinds of social forces which the king had to keep together.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sec. 21.5
- 2) Check their location with the Map in Unit 18.
- 3) See Sec. 21.5. Your answer could perhaps indicate as to how this edict hints at a culmination of Asoka's thought processes.
- 4) i) ✓ ii) × iii) ×

UNIT 22 DISINTEGRATION OF THE EMPIRE

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 Successors of Asoka
- 22.3 Other Political Factors for Disintegration
- 22.4 Asoka and His Problems
- 22.5 Economic Problems
- 22.6 Growth of Local Polities
 - 22.6.1 Major Kingdoms
 - 22.6.2 Local Kingdoms
- 22.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.8 Key Words
- 22.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

22.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to explain:

- to what extent Asoka's successors are held responsible for the disintegration of the empire,
- how various other political factors are viewed as contributing to the weakening of the empire,
- how Asoka's policies in general are considered responsible for the decline of the empire,
- the economic problems that the Mauryan empire believed to have faced, and
- the emergence of local polities in both north and south India following the decline of the Mauryan rule.

22.1 INTRODUCTION

Mauryan rule was the first experiment in imperial government in India. Chandragupta Maurya, Bindusara and Asoka were successful in establishing the imperial authority of the Mauryas over a large number of **Janpadas** or Kingdoms, and they were able to introduce a new concept in the governance of a large territory. However, the imperial authority of the Mauryas began to weaken with the death of Asoka (232 B.C.) and finally collapsed in 180 B.C. What brought the disintegration of the Mauryan empire is a very complicated question and it cannot be explained by any single factor. There are more than one factors which led to the disintegration of the Mauryan empire. In this Unit we have first discussed the responsibility of Asoka's successors for the disintegration of the empire. Then we have dealt with Asoka's policies, economic problems of the Mauryan state and the collapse of the administration of the Mauryas. Finally the growth of local polities has also been taken into consideration in explaining the process of disintegration of the Mauryan empire.

22.2 SUCCESSORS OF ASOKA

It is generally believed that Asoka died in 232 B.C. However, the Mauryan rulers continued to rule for about half a century after his death. Several literary texts like the **Puranas**, the **Avdanas** and the Jain accounts give different details of Asoka's successors. The apparent confusion in all these accounts may be due to the fact that these accounts may have been describing conditions of a divided empire. It is suggested

that after the death of Asoka the empire was divided among the surviving sons. Some of the names of Asoka's successors that we find in different texts are: Kunala, Dasharatha, Samprati, Salishuka, Devavarman, Sātadhanvan and Brihadratha. However, it is difficult to ascertain their exact period. But it appears that after Asoka the empire got fragmented and that there was quick succession of rulers.

The quick succession of rulers weakened the imperial control over administration. The early three kings, Chandragupta, Bindusara and Asoka, had organised the administration in such a way that it needed strict supervision. The quick succession of kings made this difficult as none of the rulers could actually settle down and be in the control of things. Linked to this is the fact that dynastic empires depend much on the ability of its rulers. But the successors of Asoka failed in this respect. Each one of them ruled only for a short period of time and therefore could not formulate either new policies of governance or maintain the old ones.

Despite the fact that full details for individual kings and their reigns are difficult to get, we get the picture of post-Asokan Mauryan India as one in which a lasting stability of even political control was impossible to achieve. One can generally say that these successors politically weakened the empire and therefore, lost administrative, economic and military control of it. The partition of the empire is in itself enough to show that the process of disintegration had begun immediately after the death of Asoka.

22.3 OTHER POLITICAL FACTORS FOR DISINTEGRATION

The disorder that emerged in the administrative machinery after the death of Asoka is regarded as one of the important factors for the disintegration of the Mauryan empire. The immediate problem for Asoka's successors was whether to continue his policy of **Dhamma** and its predominance in the government. This had truly been an unconventional way of governance and not a very easy way of comprehending the functioning of government. Asoka had been successful because he had the unique vision of understanding the complex social problems of a society and also he had accepted the importance of the principle of **Dhamma** in all its dimensions. It is not clear whether despite Asoka's personal exhortations his successors attached the same kind of importance to **Dhamma**, as he himself had done.

Another related feature of the political importance of **Dhamma** was the existence of a large body of officials of the State called **Dhammamahamattas**. It has been suggested by some historians that they had become very powerful and oppressive during the latter half of Asoka's reign. Asoka himself in the First Separate Edict to the **Mahamattas**, stationed at Dhauili and Jaugada, asked them to ensure against oppression and to be just and humane. Though there is no doubt that Asoka was in firm control of the administration, this cannot be said of the later kings.

It was not simply the question of the direct contact with the **Dhammamahamattas** to ensure that they did not misuse their powers, but that of controlling the whole of the Mauryan bureaucracy that was at stake. The nature of the Mauryan State necessitated a king of strong abilities. It was a system which required the king to be in direct touch with all aspects of the State's functionaries. Since these functionaries were ultimately held together by a power structure with the king at its centre, once the king became weak, the whole administration naturally weakened. Once the centre became weak, the provinces too started breaking away.

The officials of the State were personally selected by the king and owed loyalty only to him. Once weak rulers came, and ruled for short durations of time, it resulted in an overwhelming number of new officials constantly emerging and owing only personal loyalty to their respective kings and not to the State. This norm of personal loyalty had the danger of the officials either forcefully supporting the new king or opposing him. The later Mauryan kings were probably constantly faced with this situation. In fact, it were local rulers and princes that found it easy to emerge with these traditional ties to support them, as important centres of power. The provincial governments under the later Maurayas thus increasingly began to question the Centre's authority.

Though one cannot accept the notion that there were popular uprisings wrecking Mauryan State control, one can strongly suggest that the social basis of the Mauryan bureaucracy was under stress and strain resulting in an inefficient administration unable to maintain social order in general.

Whereas under the first three Mauryas the extremely complex system of spies employed for filtering in information on erring officials had worked efficiently, under the later Mauryas it collapsed. There was thus no means through which the kings could either gauge the public opinion in the empire, or, check on the corruption which had inevitably set in once weak rulers were in power at the centre.

A conscious loosening of military control on behalf of the Mauryan kings has also been suggested by some scholars as a major political reason for their decline. Since this is largely attributed to a conscious decision taken by Asoka on this matter, we shall discuss it below in the next section. At this stage we need to emphatically state that the decline of the Magadhan empire cannot staisfactorily be explained by merely stating that there were weak successors or, that there was military inactivity or, that there were popular uprisings. Each of these was in fact, fundamentally linked to the particular nature of the Mauryan imperial bureaucratic set-up and once this started cracking up the whole political structure was at stake.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Mark which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×):
- a) The quick succession of rulers led to the weakening of the imperial control. ()
 - b) The Mauryan State was decentralized and therefore easy to control. ()
 - c) The Mauryan officials had been selected on the basis of their personal loyalty to kings. ()
 - d) There were popular uprisings wrecking Mauryan State control. ()
- 2) What were the immediate administrative problems faced by the successors of Asoka. Use three or four lines to write your answer.
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- 3) What in your opinion was the crux of the problem in the administrative system of the Mauryas that caused disintegration under the later kings? Describe in 100 words.

22.4 ASOKA AND HIS POLICIES

Many scholars have opined that either Asoka's political decisions or the effects of these decisions were responsible for the disintegration of the Mauryan empire. Their arguments generally focus on the drawbacks of Asoka's religious policy. These arguments have two strands:

- i) First, there are those scholars who maintain that Pushyamitra Sunga, who killed the last Mauryan emperor represented a strong Brahmanical reaction against the pro-Buddhist policy of Asoka and the pro-Jain policy of some of his successors. Moreover, the Satavahanas who rose to power in the Deccan after the Mauryas were also said to have been Brahmanas. These scholars list a series of acts done by Asoka himself which may have antagonized the Brahmanas. For example the ban on animal sacrifices is considered one which was especially resented, since this action was taken by a Shudra King (according to the **Purana** accounts the Mauryas are listed as Shudras). They suggest that the **Dhammamahamattas**, as special officers of **Dhamma** appointed by Asoka, destroyed the prestige of the Brahmanas. These officials disallowed Brahmanas to continue their traditional laws of punishment and other **Smriti** injunctions.

However, there are no direct evidences to support the above arguments. These are broad inferences which can be equally questioned. For example, the Asokan inscriptions clearly say that the **Dhammamahamattas** were to respect the Brahmanas and the Sramans alike. It is, however, possible that in the later years these officials may have become unpopular among the people. This can be deduced on the basis of stories in the Buddhist sources. As officials meant for the establishment of **Dhamma** they undoubtedly had special powers and sanctions of the king and were therefore, feared by the people as a whole. Once they began to wield great control, it prevented Asoka's direct contact with the people. But this does not mean that these officials were specifically antagonistic to the Brahmanas. Thus, to argue that the interests of the Brahmanas were harmed by Asoka's policy and that Pushyamitra, a Brahman general engineered a revolt cannot be accepted for the simple reason that if Asoka's policies were so harmful, this should have happened immediately after his death. In fact, Pushymitra Sunga's action should at best be understood as a palace coup d'état made at an opportune time, having assessed the weak nature of the king's power, rather than looking for any deliberate anti-Brahman policy of either Asoka or his successors.

- ii) According to another group of scholars emphasis should be given to Asoka's pacifist policies as a factor for Mauryan decline. They think that this was responsible for undermining the strength of the empire. This explanation focusses on Asoka's policy of **ahimsa** or non-violence. The harmful effect of this policy is provinces who had become oppressive and ought to have been controlled. Citing examples from Buddhist stories in the **Divyavadana**, this argument goes on to could not withstand the Greek invasions. Non-violence on the part of the king also meant that he no longer exerted his control over officials particularly in the provinces who had become oppressive and ought to have been controlled, Citing examples from Buddhist stroes in the **Divyavadana**, this argument goes on to show that revolts in the provinces had been taking place.

The above image of Asoka is far from correct. Just as the theory of anti-Brahmanical activity under Asoka's reign has been discounted as a factor for Mauryan decline, so also the impression of an over pacifist Asoka, lacking in vigour and determination to rule has to be discarded. It is true that Asoka believed in non-violence as vital to **Dhamma**. There was however, no extreme stand on this issue. A dislike for killing of animals for food and sacrifice did not in fact terminate the policy of the palace to continue killing animals for food, though on a reduced scale. Aslo in governance and criminal justice, death penalty should have been done away with but this was not so. Further, we have no evidence of the army having been demobilized, nor, even a hint in the inscriptions to such a policy being intended. The evidence one has is that of only one campaign conducted against Kalinga which had ended in a ruthless defeat of the latter. Had Asoka been such a pacifist he should have reinstated Kalinga as an independent kingdom but, as a practical ruler, he maintained the supremacy of Magadha over it. There are innumerable other indications of Asoka's assertion of his control over the different people of his empire, particularly his warning to the tribes. He had made it very clear that the misconduct of the tribes living within his empire would be tolerated up to a point only and not beyond that. All these steps were taken by Asoka to see that the empire was kept secure.

Thus, to conclude, the policy of **ahimsa** in no way weakened the army and administrative machinery of the Mauryan empire. Pushyamitra Sunga was after all a general of the Mauryan army and even half a century after Asoka he is said to have prevented the Greeks from entering Madhyadesa. According to Romila Thapar even

an entire generation of pacificism cannot weaken an empire and lead to its disintegration : "Battles and territorial acquisition are not alone responsible for the creation and destruction of empires. The causes must be sought in other directions as well."

22.5 ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

D.D. Kosambi stressed on the economic problems that the Mauryas faced. These contributed substantially to the decline of the Mauryan empire. His arguments centre around two themes indicating that there were financial constraints on the Mauryan economy:

- a) that the State took excessive measures to increase the taxes on a variety of things, and
- b) that the punch-marked coins of this period show evidence of debasement of the currency.

The latter argument is based on his statistical analysis of the punch-marked coins of the period.

Some of Kosambi's views which have now generally been accepted as crucial factors in bringing about major changes in the Magadhan empire and thereby, its ultimate decline are briefly as follows:

- i) It is suggested that gradually the State monopoly of metals was being lost. The demands on iron, so crucial for the expanding agrarian economy, could no longer be met by Magadha alone. In fact, there were attempts to locate and develop new sources of it in the Deccan. Though such pockets of iron ore were found in Andhra and Karnataka, the Magadha State found it a costly operation to tap these pockets. Of the many problems they faced in this connection was also the protection of the mining areas from intrusion by the local chiefs.
- ii) The other point which is stressed is that expansion in cultivation, extensive use of forestwood and deforestation in general may have led to floods and famines. There is in fact evidence of a big famine in north Bengal in the Mauryan period. Thus many factors may have combined to bring down drastically the amount of the state revenue. In years of famine, the state was expected to provide relief on a substantial scale.

In a centralized administrative system, the problem of not having enough revenues created many other acute difficulties. To enhance the revenues, the **Arthashastra** suggested that taxes should be imposed even on actors, prostitutes and so on. The tendency to tax everything that could be taxed, emerged out of the necessity of the treasury needing more funds or, the currency having become debased due to inflation. The **Arthashastra** measures to be adopted in times of emergency are interpreted in this light. Further, the decreasing silver content of the punch-marked coins attributed to the later Maurya rulers indicate that debasement had actually taken place to meet the needs of a depleted treasury. The burden of expenditure had also increased. This can be seen in the large amounts of money spent under Asoka for public works. Also his tours and those of his officials meant using up the surplus wherever it was available. The earlier stringent measures of the State's control on its finances had thus begun to change even during Asoka's reign.

Romila Thapar has further commented on these issues. According to her the debasement of coins need not necessarily have meant a pressure on the general economy. In fact, it is difficult to say precisely when and where the debasement of coinage took place. In positive terms she argues that for many parts of the Indian sub-continent the general picture of the economy on the basis of the material evidence in fact indicates an improvement. This is particularly seen in the use of better quality materials which indicates a technical advance. There may have been debasement of coinage but in her opinion it was not because of a decline in material standards, but rather, because of extreme political confusion, particularly in the Ganges Valley. This must have led to hoarding of money by merchant classes and debasement of coinage. However, she concludes : "There is no doubt of the economic prosperity that prevailed with the political decline of the Mauryan empire."

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Mark which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×):
 - a) Asoka was successful in providing conditions for a Brahmanical revolt. ()
 - b) None of Asoka's policies advocated pacifism. ()
 - c) The silver content of the later Mauryan punch-marked coins had increased. ()
 - d) Hoarding of coins under the later Mauryas must have led to their debasement. ()
- 2) Which one of the following was **not** a cause for the decline of the Mauryas? Tick (✓) the right answer.
 - a) Deforestation in the Ganges Valley led to the incidence of floods.
 - b) Ban of animal sacrifices led to popular uprisings.
 - c) Certain powerful officials could not be controlled by the later Mauryas.
 - d) Increased expenditure of various sorts was a strain on the imperial treasury.
- 3) List the views of those scholars that advocate Asoka's policies being responsible for Mauryan decline in about six lines.
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- 4) Would you agree with Kosambi that the major factor for Mauryan decline were the economic problems that the empire faced. Give reasons for your answer in 100 words.
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22.6 GROWTH OF LOCAL POLITIES

If the material and technical advance of the country was not hampered by the political decline of the Mauryas, it can then be said that the material basis of many of the local polities/kingdoms was strong enough for them to emerge with renewed strength in the, post-Mauryan period. The Mauryas in fact, had directly governed only the major and vital areas of the empire the centre of which was **Magadha**. It is most probable that its governors/officials administering the core areas were selected from amongst the local peoples. These officials were often very powerful and acted as a check on the Viceroy or representative of the kings. As mentioned earlier, the political loyalty of these officials was crucial for the imperial structure to continue. A change of king meant a re-alignment of these loyalties. If this happened often, as it did in the post-Asokan period, fundamental weaknesses would begin to inevitably creep in and prove the system unsuccessful.

The half a dozen kings that had succeeded Asoka had made no basic change in the policy of governance adopted by the first three Mauryas. It has also been suggested that some of these kings probably ruled more or less concurrently over several parts of the empire. This indicates a segmentation of the empire even under the Mauryas.

22.6.1 Major Kingdoms

The disintegration of the Mauryan empire was followed by the rise of a number of kingdoms in different parts of India. Immediately after the Mauryas Pushyamitra established the Sunga dynasty and the Sungas were able to control only a part of the erstwhile Mauryan empire. The Sunga family had held the Viceroyship at Ujjain in western Malwa or the neighbouring region of Vidisha in eastern Malwa under the Mauryas. The Sungas tried to revive Vedic practices and sacrifices which may have perhaps been necessary to face the new invaders, namely the Greeks and to establish their strength after their first king had usurped the throne. The Sungas were followed by the short-lived rule of the Kanvas. The Greeks, however, in due course of time became exceedingly successful in most parts of north-west India. Their rule could only be terminated by the Sakas who had settled along the Indus. The Parthian or Pahlavas also made inroads in north-western India. But, the most successful foreign intrusions were made from the first half of the first century A.D. with the establishment of the Kushana empire.

In the Ganga valley, Rajasthan, eastern India and the Deccan many ruling families came to power. It is clear that under the Mauryas the maximum settlements of villages had been in the Ganges Valley. The hills and plains of Assam and Bengal still remained to be opened up. Similarly, the south and south-east of India had contact with the Magadhan empire but a large scale agrarian economy had yet to come up in these regions. After the decline of Mauryan rule many local rulers started ruling in regions like Vidarbha, eastern Deccan, Karnataka and western Maharashtra. Gradually, the family of the Satavahanas built up an empire in the Deccan by bringing together many local centres (you will read the details in Unit 27, Block-7).

At about the same time when the early Satavahanas were establishing themselves, Kharavela of Kalinga emerged as a powerful king in the Mahanadi region. In an inscription written during his reign and found at the Hathigumpha cave of Udayagiri hill near Bhubaneswar, Kharvela claims that he was the third ruler of the Mahameghavana family of Kalinga; that this family was a branch of the ancient Chedi family. He is said to have raided a major part of the country including Magadha and the Satavahana and Pandya countries. He was an ardent follower of Jainism.

In the extreme South the three important chiefdoms that continued to be prominent from the Maurya period were the Cheras who controlled the Malabar area, the Cholas who held sway on the south-eastern coast and the Kaveri Valley and the Pandyas whose power centre lay around the tip of the Peninsula. The Sangam texts of this period give us a considerable amount of information on the society, ecology, polity and economy of the region these three kingdoms ruled.

The above outline briefly discusses the geographical areas and the political complexion of the major foreign and indigenous kingdoms which became powerful for varied periods of time in the immediately post-Mauryan period.

22.6.2 Local Kingdoms

Numerous local or sub-regional powers also grew in this period either under the stimulus of the advancing agrarian economy or, in some regions under the stimulus of trade. Various Indian literary sources, like the **Puranas**, mention of such tribal names as Naga, Gardabhila and Abhira during this period. They were being ruled by their kings. Thus four Naga kings, seven Gardabhila kings, thirteen Pusyamitras, ten Abhira kings of the post-Mauryan period are listed. The Gardabhilas probably emerged from the large Bhila tribe (the Bhils) of the forests of central and western India. Some of the Abhiras are known to have developed into Ahir castes, some of them famous as pastoralists. Along with these we have other tribes who underwent change during this period and are known through the coins they minted in their own names or with names of their **janapadas**. The Yaudheyas were famous even in the time of Panini as professional warriors and during this period were said to have been suppressed by Rudradaman, the Saka king. Their territory is said to have comprised

the land between the Sutlej and the Yamuna. Similarly, to the south-east of Mathura, the Arjunaya had established their autonomy towards the end of the Sunga rule.

In the Punjab, occupying the land between the Ravi and the Beas we have mention of the Audumbaras. The Kunindas are said to have become prominent between the Beas and the Yamuna around the foothills of Sivalik hills. Other tribal republics, as they are popularly known, for this period are those of the Sibis, Malavas, Trigartas and so on. These **janapadas** interspersed the region of northern and north-western India and at the same time independent principalities like Ayodhya, Kaushambi, Mathura and Ahichchhatra also re-asserted their power having earlier succumbed to the Mauryas.

For the Deccan we have some information mainly derived from coins of many minor local rulers and ruling families over whom the Satavahanas were able to establish their superamacy. For example, the families of Maharathis, Kuras and Anardas are known from Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra. Besides, many local chiefs of the Deccan who issued coins emerged during this period. For the extreme south we know that the chiefs of the three main chiefdoms (Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas) were constantly at war with the minor chiefs of the less developed regions. The Velir chieftains, for instance, were famous as they controlled important outlets to the Roman trade on the south-east coast.

Though attempts were made in the post-Mauryan period by various dynasties to build empires, there were several instances of each of them contending the other. Further sub-regional powers could not totally be suppressed. Whereas, on the one hand, the political decline of the Mauryas created a situation for many of these local powers to arise, on the other, the economic expansion witnessed in the Mauryan period continued unabated. The crisis in the Magadhan empire under the Mauryas was thus one of organisation and control of its resources and not a lack of them.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Mark which of the following statments are right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - a) Pushyamitra Sunga was probably a governor at Ujjain under the Mauryas. ()
 - b) The Satavahanas succeeded the Mauryas in the extreme south. ()
 - c) The Sangam texts tell us about the three kingdoms of the Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas. ()
 - d) The tribal kingdoms in the post-Mauryan period were able to drive out Cheras and Pandyas. ()
 - e) Ayodhya, Kausambi, Mathura, Ahichchhatra were tribal republics. ()
- 2) Outline the major political changes in north and south India in the post-Mauryan period in about 100 words.

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- 3) Using the code given below identify three of the most important factors for Mauryan decline: .

- 1) Rebellion of the Brahmanas
- 2) Weakening of State Control

- 3) Increase in imperial expenditure
- 4) Invasions by foreign powers
- 5) Inability to create effective resources base
- 6) Inactivity of the army

Code

- a) 1, 6, 4
- b) 2, 3, 4
- c) 2, 3, 5
- d) 1, 5, 6

22.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have analysed the various factors for the disintegration of the Mauryan empire and the rise of local polities in its wake. The successors of Asoka failed to maintain the integrity of the empire which they inherited from Asoka. The partition of the empire after Asoka and quick succession of rulers no doubt weakened the basis of the empire. But more important is the fact that the inherent contradictions in the Mauryan imperial set up accentuated the crisis. The highly centralised bureaucracy with its loyalty to the king and not to the state made the administration completely individual based. And the change of king meant the change of officials and this had a very adverse effect on administration after Asoka.

We have seen that how some of the views of the earlier scholars that hold Asoka and his policies responsible for the decline of the Mauryas are not acceptable in the light of the contemporary evidence. The attempt by some scholars to explain the disintegration of the Mauryan empire in terms of economic problems has also been taken into consideration. Finally, we have also highlighted the growth of local polities both in the North and South which accelerated the process of disintegration of the Mauryan Empire.

22.8 KEY WORDS

Bureaucracy: System of government by officials responsible to an authority.

Coup d'etat: A violent or unconstitutional change in government.

Erring: Those staying away from the right path.

Exploitation: An act of using for selfish purposes at the expense of others.

Local: Pertaining to a particular place or area.

Pacifist: Opposed to war or one who believes all war is wrong.

Polities: Forms of political organisation — some could be monarchical, or republican or tribal.

Regional: Characterized in a particular way referring to a tract of country or area or district.

22.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) ✓
b) ×
c) ✓
d) ×

- 2) You have to write about the problem in the continuation of Asoka's policy of Dhamma and controlling the Dhammamahamattas. See Sec. 22.3

- 3) Your answer should include the following points; centralised administration, officials' loyalty to the king not to the state, nature of bureaucracy, etc.
See Sec. 22.3

Check Your Progress 2

- a) ×
b) ✓
c) ×
d) ✓
- 2) (b)
- 3) Your answer should include : pro-Buddhist policy of Asoka, pacifist policies of Asoka and the reaction of the Brahmanas to this. Sec. 22.4.
- 4) Read Sec. 22.5 and write the answer giving your own argument.

Check Your Progress 3

- a) ✓
b) ✓
c) ✓
d) ×
e) ×
- 2) You have to write about the emergence of major indigenous and foreign kingdoms as well as the tribal kingdoms following the disintegration of the Mauryan empire.
See Sub-Secs. 22.6.1. and 22.6.2.
- 3) (b)

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

- Basham A.L., *The Wonder That Was India*, New Delhi, 1967.
- Bongard-Levin, G.M., *Mauryan India*, New Delhi, 1985.
- Jha, D.N., *Ancient India : An Introductory Outline*, New Delhi, 1977.
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UNIT 23 NORTHERN-WESTERN AND NORTHERN INDIA

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Sources
- 23.3 The Sungas
- 23.4 The Indo-Greeks
- 23.5 The Sakas
- 23.6 The Parthians
- 23.7 The Kushanas
- 23.8 Local Powers of North India
- 23.9 Significance of Contacts between Central Asia and North India
 - 23.9.1 Trade and Technology
 - 23.9.2 Material Remains
 - 23.9.3 Polity
 - 23.9.4 Religion and Art Forms
- 23.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.11 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

23.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to comprehend :

- political events in India from the close of the Mauryan period to about 300 A.D.
- the assimilation of diverse foreign elements into the mainstream of Indian society.
- the impact of Central Asian contacts in the fields of trade and technology, religion, art and material remains of that period.

23.1 INTRODUCTION

In Block V, you read about the emergence and consolidation of the first empire in India, that of the Mauryas. You read in detail about the political expansion, the polity, the policy of Dhamma as envisaged by Asoka, and finally, the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire. You will recall that the final blow to the last of the Mauryan Kings was rendered by Pushyamitra Sunga in about 180 B.C. The period which commenced from about 200 B.C. did not witness a large empire, but it is historically important as one in which there were widespread cultural contacts with Central Asia, and the assimilation of foreign elements into the Indian society. This period witnessed the emergence of a number of political regions in north and north-western India. We will take up for our study some of the more prominent dynasties like the Sungas, the Indo-Greeks, the Sakas, the Parthians and the Kushanas. We will also study the cultural contacts in various fields, like trade, technology, art, and religion.

23.2 SOURCES

The political history of this period has to be pieced together by going through different types of sources. For some regions, the Puranic lists of dynasties and rulers become important sources of information. Inscriptional sources are also very important and in some cases, they supplement the information that we get from the **Puranas**.

For the period immediately succeeding the overthrow of the Mauryas scraps of information are found in such texts as: the **Gargi Samhita**, the **Mahabhashya** of Patanjali, the **Divyavadana**, the **Malavikagnimitra** of Kalidasa and the **Harshacharita** of Bana. Evidence of Sunga history comes to us also from the inscriptions from Ayodhya, Vidisa and Bharhut.

In the post-Mauryan period political power did not remain in the hands of one family. Two main trends are seen in this period. One is that in the north west, there was a succession of rulers, first of Greek Origin, then of Saka or Parthian origin and next of Yuch-chi origin. The second trend was that in the major part of northern India minor local ruling families came up. In some areas, we also find **gana-samghas** distributed over a wide area in this period. For all these ruling families, the most important data are provided by the different types of coins minted by them. Coins, with the names of rulers appearing on them, thus become a major source now, but for the political history of this period, this source has to be supplemented by other sources. Cultural contacts with parts of Western Asia but more with Central Asia became regular in this period. So for the north western region some other types of sources become important in this period. For example in addition to coins, inscriptions written in Kharosthi script are found in large numbers in this period in the region of Gandhara and there are many Kharosthi documents found in Central Asia as well. Similarly, there are stray references in Greek and Latin sources to regions of north western India and its rulers. In the Buddhist sources too we find evidence regarding this period. For example, the Pali work **Milinda-Panha** (The questions of Milinda) bears on the **Yavana** King Menander and on Buddhism in this period. The Chinese historical chronicles too contain references to contemporary events in Central Asia, Bactria and north west India. For example, for information on the early history of the Yuch-chis or the Kushanas, we have to depend on the chronicles of early Han and later Han dynasties of China.

23.3 THE SUNGAS

The Sungas, a brahmana family, possibly originally belonged to the region of Ujjain in Western India, where they worked as officials under the Maurya Kings. The founder of the Sunga dynasty was Pushyamitra Sunga who according to tradition, assassinated the last of the Maurya Kings Brihadratha in 180 B.C. This is corroborated by Bana, the Sanskrit prose writer and court poet of Harshvardhana of Kanauj. Pushyamitra appears to have been a keen supporter of Brahmanism and is known to have undertaken the performance of the **asvamedha** or horse sacrifice, a Vedic ritual symbolising royal glory. In the Ayodhya inscription of Dhanadeva, Pushyamitra is credited with the performance of two horse sacrifices. This is indicative of Pushyamitra's hold over a large territory and also of Brahmanical orthodoxy. Buddhist sources claim that he persecuted the Buddhists. The Buddhist tradition as is preserved in the **Divyavadana** depicts Pushyamitra as a destroyer of Buddhist monasteries and places of worship, particularly those constructed by Asoka. (For further discussion on this read Unit 25 in this Block.)

The **Puranas** assign a reign of 36 years to Pushyamitra, who was succeeded by his son Agnimitra. Very little information has been gathered about his rule. Muladeva appears to be an important King with whom may have started the disintegration of the Sunga dynasty. Some historians have identified him as the King whose coins have been found at Ayodhya and he may be regarded as a predecessor of Dhanadeva described as 'Lord of Kosala' in the Ayodhya inscription. Muladeva has been regarded as the ruler of the independent principality of Kosala. The original Sungas soon came to be confined only to Magadha and the Central Indian territories only. The last Sunga King was Devabhuti. He was the fourth ruler of the line and if we believe Banabhatta, author of **Harsha-Charita** he fell victim to the conspiracy of his brahmana minister Vasudeva. Thus, the Sunga line came to an end around 75 B.C. and although Vasudeva started a new line of rulers, called Kanva, it lasted only four generations.

23.4 THE INDO-GREEKS

From about 200 B.C. a series of movements across the north western borders of the Indian sub-continent took place. Among the first to cross the Hindukush were the Greeks, who ruled Bactria, south of the Oxus river in the area covered by North Afghanistan. Alexander's invasion in north western India did not result in Greece and India coming together in any significant manner. The mingling of the two cultures came about in the second century B.C. through the Greek kings of Bactria who moved into northwest India and came to be called the Indo - Greeks.

After the fall of the Achaemenid rule in Iran and the death of Alexander, Iran and the neighbouring areas passed under the rule of Alexander's generals. Gradually the Greek rulers of Bactria who were originally subordinate to the Seleacids, and the Arsacid rulers of Parthia started asserting their autonomy. The Greek rulers faced a severe threat from the Scythian tribes. With the construction of the Chinese Wall the Scythians could not move towards China and in turn attacked the Greeks and Parthians. Pushed by the Scythian tribes the Bactrian Greeks were forced to move towards India. These invasions had begun by the end of the Mauryan rule and the successors of Asoka were not strong to resist them. From the first half of the second century B.C. the Indo - Greeks occupied a large part of north western India. They also undertook occasional expeditions to the Ganga basin and other parts of the country and they came as far as Panchala, Saketa and Pataliputra.

One of the most famous Indo - Greek rulers was Menander or Milinda. During the period of his rule, the Indo - Greek power extended from the Swat Valley to Punjab as far as the Ravi river. He had his capital at Sakala (modern Sialkot) in Punjab. Menander is best remembered for his conversion to Buddhism by Nagasena, a Buddhist monk and philosopher. Menander asked Nagasena many questions relating to Buddhism. These questions and Nagasena's answers were recorded in the form of a book known as **Milinda - Panha** or **The Questions of Milinda**.

The names of at least thirty Bactrian Greek rulers are known from a large number of coins. Menander's coins have been located as far as Kabul in the north and Mathura near Delhi. The history of the Indo - Greeks has been reconstructed mostly with the help of their coins bearing legends in Greek and later in Kharosthi and Brahmi as well. The evidence is sometimes confusing, as many kings had identical names and the coins of one ruler can be distinguished from those of another only with great difficulty. Influence of Indo - Greek coinage, particularly silver coinage, which was excellent in workmanship is found present in some coin series issued by some local rulers of the period. The nature of the coinage and the wide area in which it circulated suggest wide trade contacts. The Indo - Greeks are also important for their introduction of Hellenistic art features in north-western India which culminated in the Gandhara art style.

23.5 THE SAKAS

The Sakas are referred to also as Scythians. In the Indian context, the sources sometimes mention the Scythians and Parthians together as Saka-Pahlawa. Even from the names of the rulers it is at times impossible to distinguish between a Saka and a Pahlawa. Even so some families of rulers, which were associated with different regions of north-western, northern and western have been distinguished as Saka. The Sakas poured into India through the Bolan Pass and may have first settled in lower Indus region. There are coins and other sources associated with different branches of the Sakas. One branch is believed to have settled in Afghanistan. Another line of the Sakas settled in Punjab with Taxila as the capital. There was another that ruled from Mathura. A fourth branch was that which established itself in Western and Central India from where they continued their rule till about the fourth century A.D.

The Sakas were successful in destroying the Greek suzerainty over Bactria. They belonged to the nomad hordes of Central Asia. The Sakas were forced by another Central Asian tribe, the Yueh - chi to leave their habitat on the Bactrian border and follow the Greeks into India. The Sakas gradually spread their supremacy over the northern and north-western regions of India at the expense of the local Indo - Greek rulers. There are different types of sources for the reconstruction of the Sakas in India. There are references to the people in Greek and Graeco-Roman annals and in early Chinese accounts. Epigraphic and numismatic sources are also useful. The earliest Indian textual reference to the Sakas is perhaps to be found in the Mahabhashya. The Puranic and epic texts also mention the Sakas along with the Kambojas and the Yavanas in the extreme north.

The first Saka King in India was Maues or Moga, who established Saka power in Gandhara. Maues is known from a series of coins and also from inscriptions, one of which contains a date. A dated copper plate inscription discovered in Taxila records the establishment of the relics of Buddha in a Stupa during the period of Maues. Maues was succeeded by Azes who successfully attacked the last of the Greek kings in Northern India, Hippostratos.

- iii) The author of **Harshacharita** is Kalidasa.
 - iv) Menander was a Buddhist convert.
 - v) The Junagarh Rock inscription was written in Sanskrit.
- 2) Who were the Sungas? Give an outline of their rule. Answer in 10 lines.

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- 3.) What was the significance of the rule of the Sakas in north west India? Explain in 10 lines.

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- 4) What is the most important source for the reconstruction of the history between 200 B.C. – 300 A.D. ? Explain in five lines.

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23.7 THE KUSHANAS

We now take up for our study another dynasty, the Kushanas who succeeded the Parthians in the extreme north-west and spread themselves in successive stages in the regions of Northern India. The Kushanas are also referred to as Yueh-chis or Tocharians. They belonged to one of the five clans of the Yueh-chi tribe. They were a nomadic people, originally from the steppes of North Central Asia, living in the vicinity of China. They were responsible for ousting the Sakas in Bactria and also the Parthians in the Gandhara region. The Kushanas first consolidated territories beyond the Indian border. Gradually their authority in India

expanded and came to extend to over lower Indus basin and most of the Gangetic plain down Varanasi. Although their empire lasted for about one century and a little more, their connection with India, their assimilation into Indian society as well as their contribution to Indian culture left a deep impression on the Indian mind. Like the Sakas and Pahlavas, they too are mentioned in Epic, Puranic and other literature. The Kushanas were particularly important as their empire became a meeting point of civilizations of the Mediterranean world, Western Asia, Central Asia, China and India.

We have coins, inscriptions and other sources which provide evidence about two successive dynasties of the Kushanas. The first line was started by Kujula Kadphises who is believed to have united the five tribes of the Yueh-chi and made successful inroads into India, establishing himself in Kabul and Kashmir. Kujula Kadphises minted different types of coins in copper and one type of his coins has a Roman-style male bust on it. Kujula Kadphises was succeeded by Vima Kadphises. Vima introduced a new phase of coinage in India. The practice of issuing gold coins by Indian rulers regularly started with him. He minted different types of gold coins which broadly followed the weight system of Roman gold coins and this system continued, with certain modifications, till the Gupta period. Obviously, Vima's gold coins and copper coins indicate further intensification of contact with the Roman world of the time.

The Kadphises rulers were succeeded by Kanishka I, who is the best known Kushana ruler in Indian history, particularly because of his association with Buddhism. The relationship between the first two kings (Kadphises) and Kanishka is shrouded in mystery, but he too was of Central Asian origin. He may not have been directly related to the first two kings. The Kushanas reached the zenith of their power under Kanishka I. His period is historically significant for general cultural development in Northern India as well as for the intermingling of peoples of different geographical regions.

The accession of Kanishka I to the throne has been variously dated somewhere between A.D. 78-144 and sometimes even later. An era with its initial date in A.D. 78 has popularly come to be regarded as the Saka Era and this date seems to be the most likely date for Kanishka's accession. The Kushana empire at its peak extended to Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh and to Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. Mathura appears to have been the second capital city, the first being at Purushapura near modern Peshawar. At Purushapura, Kanishka erected a monastery and a huge Stupa.

Kanishka I is an important figure in the history of Buddhism as being one of its great patrons. He sponsored the fourth Buddhist council during his reign to discuss matters relating to Buddhist theology and doctrine. The doctrines of the Mahayana form of Buddhism were finalized at the council. Missionary activity was given an impetus and during his period Buddhist monks started travelling to Central Asia and to China. Kanishka was also a patron of art and Sanskrit literature.

The successors of Kanishka I continued to rule for over a century, but Kushana power gradually declined. Some of the rulers used very Indian names such as Vasudeva. The Kushana empire in Afghanistan and in the region west of the Indus was superseded in the mid-third century A.D. by the Sassanian power which began in Iran. Peshawar and Taxila were lost to the Sassanians and the Kushanas were reduced to the position of subordinates of these rulers.

23.8 LOCAL POWERS OF NORTH INDIA

We have so far sketched the history of the prominent dynasties that ruled northern and north western India between 200 B.C. - 300 A.D. It may be pointed out that simultaneously with major powers there were many pockets of local dynasties and powers that ruled for varying lengths of time. We shall make a brief reference to them here.

We have already referred to the Kanvas or the Kanvayanas. Their rule was founded by Vasudeva after the Sungas. Their power was shortlived and perhaps confined only to Magadha. This line of rulers is mentioned in the **Puranas**. Some types of coins may have been minted by rulers of this family.

Further west, in the upper Ganga Yamuna basin, a number of local families came to power and coins provide us with names of numerous rulers who minted them. Thus numismatic evidence indicates that independent principalities came into existence at Ayodhya, Kausambi, Mathura and Panchala almost simultaneously.

The Punjab, which was perhaps a part of the Sunga territories during the reign of Pushyamitra was lost to his successors. The Greeks occupied the area as far as Ravi. Taking advantage of the weakness of the later Sungas and on the strength of their economic prosperity, some of the Kshatriya tribes living between the Ravi and the Yamuna asserted their autonomy. Some of them were the

- Audumbaras who occupied the land between the upper courses of Ravi and the Beas,
- Kunindas who ruled the territory between the upper courses of the Beas and the Yamuna along the foothills of the Siwalik ranges.
- Trigartas who ruled the plain country between the rivers Ravi and Sutlej,
- Yaudheyas who were famous as warriors and ruled the territory between Sutlej and Yamuna and parts of eastern Rajasthan,
- Arjunayanas, Malavas and Sibis distributed in different parts of Rajasthan.

Another region which came into prominence now was Kalinga in Orissa. You will recall that Kalinga was reconquered by Asoka from the local power although we do not know who Asoka's contemporary local ruler was. However, in the post-Maurya period we know of a local line of rulers named Mahameghavahanas. The Mahameghavahanas were descended from the ancient line of the Chedis. Kharavela, the third ruler of this line, is known from his Hathigumpha inscription which was engraved on the Udayagiri hills near Bhubaneswar. The inscription which gives year-wise account of his reign till its thirteenth year shows that Kharavela was a great king with military victories in north India, western India and south India to his credit; he also undertook many public works for his subjects and as a practising jaina, he excavated cave-shelters for jaina monks on the Udayagiri hills.

23.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTACTS BETWEEN CENTRAL ASIA AND NORTH INDIA

The political domination over northern and north western parts of India by rulers coming from outside also implied coming in of new elements of culture, the assimilation of these elements into the mainstream of Indian society and resultant impact of this contact on the development of trade, technology, art forms etc. We shall examine the impact of Central Asian contacts under different sub-headings.

23.9.1 Trade and Technology

The movement of foreigners into India established firmly the basis of regular trade contact between Central Asia and India. Trade contacts with Afghanistan were already existing but now Central Asia also opened up to trade with new routes. One of these routes became famous as the old Silk Route. Traders of different ethnic origins established trading stations and colonies from which the merchants operated. Examples of such places are Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, Miran, etc.

The impetus to trade was given not only by Indian merchants but also by the Buddhist missionaries. One result of trade movements was that communication with China improved. The Kushanas controlled the silk route which started from China and passed through Central Asia and Afghanistan and Western Asia. This route was a source of great income to the Kushanas. They levied tolls from the traders. India received a good deal of gold from the Altai mountains in Central Asia. Gold could also have been received from trade with the Roman Empire. It is significant that the Kushana rulers were the first to issue gold coins on a significant scale. You will read about trade routes and contacts in Unit 24 of this Block in greater length.

New elements in cavalry and techniques of war were introduced in India by the Sakas and the Kushanas. Horse riding gained popularity. They popularized the use of reins and saddles which find appearance in the Buddhist sculptures of this period. The passion for

horsemanship is evident from the numerous terracotta figures excavated from Begram in Afghanistan depicting equestrian scenes. The Central Asians also brought in cap, helmet and boots which were used by the warriors. This military technology became popular in North West India.

23.9.2 Material Remains

The material remains in the form of structures and pottery and coins give us a clear picture of the introduction of new elements in the already existing techniques. The Saka-Kushana phase is demonstrative of an advance in building activities. Excavations have revealed several layers of structures in Northern India. They point to the use of burnt bricks for both the floor and the roof. Brick wells may also have been introduced during this period. The pottery of this period is red ware, both plain and polished, with sometimes medium and sometimes fine fabric. The distinctive pots are sprinklers and spouted channels. They have resemblance to the red fabric found in the same period in the Kushana layers of Central Asia. Some of the coins of the Kushanas borrowed many features of Roman coins. The Saka coins in many cases were adaptations from those of the Indo-Greeks, though striking originalities are met with.

23.9.3 Polity

The Sakas and the Kushana put great emphasis on the notion of the divine origin of kingship. The Kushana kings were referred to as Sons of God. This title may have been borrowed from the Chinese. They also sometimes used an Indian version of the Roman title Caesar. This was used to stress royal authority. Similar ideas are found in the work of the Brahmana Lawgiver, Manu.

The Sakas had introduced the **satrapa** system in the administrative set-up. The entire empire was divided to satraps. Evidence of governing through subordinate rulers is available. The method of administering districts and other smaller units with the help of such officials as **meridarkhs** was in vogue in the period of Indo – Greek rule. Epigraphic and numismatic data furnish us with names of a large number of **Kshatrapas** and **Mahakshatrapas**. (See Sec. 23.5 of this Unit.)

Some of the foreign rulers also introduced the practice of hereditary dual rule which meant two kings, holding higher and lower status, ruling in the same kingdom at the same time. For example, father and son would rule simultaneously. The practice of military governorship was also introduced probably by the Greeks. These governors were known by the title of **Strategos**. They were important for two reasons : (a) for maintaining the power of the rulers over the indigenous people and (b) for blocking invasions from the north west.

23.9.4 Religion and Art Forms

We have noted earlier in this unit that some of the kings like Menander and Kanishka were converted to Buddhism. Some of the rulers were worshippers of Vishnu; others of Siva. We have an example of the Kushana ruler Vasudeva, whose name is one of the many names of Krishna who was worshipped as an incarnation of Vishnu. Some Kushana rulers worshipped both Siva and Buddha and the images of these two Gods appeared on some of the Kushana coins. We can discern therefore that in the process of assimilation into Indian cultural patterns, the foreigners adapted to Indian ideas and forms of worship. The foreign rulers were also patrons of Indian art and literature. We have evidence that masons and other artisans coming from outside interacted with local workers. Indian craftsmen thus came into contact with those skilled in Greek and Roman craftsmanship. We have the example of Gandhara in which images of the Buddha were sculpted in a style which was typical of the synthesis of many cultural elements present in the region. The influence of Gandhara art spread to Mathura. Mathura also has given us many beautiful images of the Buddha and other specimens of art of this period. Details of the art forms are discussed in the unit on Art and Architecture in this block.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Read the following statements and make right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - i) The Kushanas belonged to the Yueh-chi Tribe.
 - ii) The Kanvayanas were a local dynasty ruling from Magadha.

- iii) The Yaudheyas were famous as warriors and ruled the territory between the rivers Ravi and Sutlej.
 - iv) The **Satrap** system was introduced into India by the Sakas.
- 2) Write short notes on the following in about 15 lines.
- a) Impact of Central Asian Contact.

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- b) Assimilation of the foreigners into the Indian mainstream.

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23.10 LET US SUM UP

The Greeks, the Sakas, the Parthians and the Kushanas gradually merged into Indian society. They came to India as warriors and therefore most of them were absorbed in the Indian society as the warrior class or the Kshatriyas. The problem of assimilating them by applying

India : Century 200 B.C.
to 300 A.D.

Brahmanical norms to them was accomplished by Brahmana lawgivers in the following manner. They were regarded as belonging to that category of Kshatriyas who had fallen from their duties. Large numbers of the foreigners were thus given a status in the brahmanical set-up without which their assimilation in the Indian social order would have been incomplete.

We have, in the course of this unit, surveyed the main political trends in India from the post-Mauryan period till about A.D. 300. In north India, political control was exercised mainly by groups who originated in Central Asia and moved across India's north western border. This opened up communications and trade routes between different countries and had a far-reaching impact on the cultural patterns of the period through movements of peoples and ideas.

23.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) (i) ✓ (ii) ✓ (iii) × (iv) ✓ (v) ✓
- 2) See Sec. 23.3
- 3) See Sec. 23.5
- 4) You should find out from Sec. 23.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) (i) ✓ (ii) ✓ (iii) × (iv) ✓
- 2) a) You should emphasize the impact on trade and technology, polity and religion and art forms. Read Sec. 23.9.
b) See Sec. 23.7.

UNIT 24 EXPANSION IN NETWORK OF TRADE AND URBANISATION

Structure

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Geographical Background
- 24.3 Political Framework
- 24.4 Expansion of Trade and Production of Commodities
 - 24.4.1 Internal Trade
 - 24.4.2 External Trade
 - 24.4.3 Principal Trade Routes
 - 24.4.4 Urban Centres
- 24.5 Role of Religion in Trade
- 24.6 Position of Traders
- 24.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

24.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to learn :

- how items of trade were acquired or manufactured,
- how trade was conducted and organised,
- which were the major trade routes in north India,
- about the important urban centres that developed,
- about the commercial contacts between India and other countries, and
- the position of traders in society.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

In Block 4 you learnt how developments in the later Vedic period led to the growth of cities in the 6th century B.C. These early cities were located either on the banks of the Ganga or on its major tributaries which were used for communication. A majority of them, were political centres and capitals of the early monarchical kingdoms. Some of them had mud ramparts and earthen embankments, but by and large they were unplanned settlements. Archaeological excavations at these early sites have been few and have failed to reveal any evidence of early monuments. It is not until the Mauryan period when the capital was shifted from Rajagriha to Pataliputra that there are traces of monumental architecture. As compared to these early beginnings the pace of urbanisation accelerated in the post-Mauryan period. The number of cities increased and these now combined political and commercial functions. There was a greater use of brick, both for residential structures as well as for fortifications and public buildings. It is also at this time that imposing religious monuments were built and embellished.

Similarly, trade activities were carried out primarily in essential commodities such as salt, metals, etc. The early trade routes gained more importance under the Mauryas. There were two reasons for this :

- i) Gold, gems and diamonds mined in the Deccan and transported along trade routes were required to sustain the royal treasury.
- ii) The state derived revenue by taxing the traders and hence encouraged trading activity.

The revenue from trade and agriculture was necessary to pay for the administrative machinery and the military maintained by the state. We also know that trade was carried on along land routes as well as by sea. During the Mauryan period, maritime trade was carried on mainly along the coast. The ports along the west coast were probably those of Bharuch at the mouth of the Narmada and Sopara near present day Bombay. In the east, Tamralipti or present day Tamluk provided an important outlet for ships sailing to Burma. We shall now see how these land and sea routes expanded around the second and first centuries B.C.

24.2 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

In this unit we shall discuss the developments that took place in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent. The dividing line for this purpose will be the Vindhya range. Thus the Deccan will be largely outside the scope of this unit.

Some aspects of the geographical features are significant from a historical point of view. The two major river systems that dominate the northern part of the Indian sub-continent are those of the Indus and the Ganga. The Ganga river system is very different from that of the Indus and this has influenced the location and growth of settlements in the north. The Ganga rises in the Himalayas and in its journey to the Bay of Bengal it receives the waters of many tributaries along the way. These tributaries such as the Yamuna, Gomati, Ghagara, Gandak, etc. add to the flow of water in the Ganga with the result that even in the summer months enough water is available for irrigation and agriculture. The south-west monsoons bring rainfall mainly to the middle and lower Ganga valley and the region is fertile and capable of supporting large populations. Not only is the Ganga valley agriculturally productive but the river itself is also navigable along its length. From ancient times there has been regular traffic of men and commodities on the Ganga and the river has been the life-line of the north, connecting the cities of the northwest with those near the coast.

As against this the Indus receives very little rainfall from the south-west monsoon. Its main tributaries, the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Sutlej and Beas join it in the Punjab making the region fertile. But for the rest of its course to the Arabian Sea, the Indus flows mainly through the desert, constantly losing water in the process. This has considerably reduced the usefulness of the river for agricultural production as well as for navigation. Thus, as expected, the major cities of the north were located along the Ganga.

Another factor that has been crucial is the location of passes in the Himalayan ranges. These passes have been important for the movement of trade commodities into India as well as for forging links between India and Central Asia. We shall see later in this unit how routes once established were used not only for commercial purposes, but also for the spread of religion.

24.3 POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

A review of the political situation in north India is essential as it is linked to one of the questions that we shall discuss later in this unit. Who controlled trade? Was it controlled by kings and rulers or was it in the hands of traders and merchants? You have seen earlier that under the Mauryas the centre of power was Magadha. But with the decline of the Mauryan dynasty Magadha lost its prime position and many centres of power developed in the subsequent period. The Ganga valley, especially Magadha, continued to be ruled by the Sungas and later by the Kanvas till the beginning of the Christian era.

In the north-west were the Indo-Greek kings whose history is known mainly from coins issued by them. Their rule came to an end with attacks by nomadic tribes from Central Asia. The first of these were the Sakas and the Parthians. The second was by the Yueh - chi tribes. They established themselves in Kabul and Kashmir and started the line of Kusana kings. The most important Kusana ruler was Kaniska-I though the exact dates of his rule are still debated. The capital of the Kusanas was Purusapura near the modern Peshawar, while Mathura had the status of almost the second capital. Their kingdom stretched as far east as Varanasi and as far south as Sanchi. Under Kaniska close links were established with Central Asia and China and overland trade with these regions prospered.

In addition to the major dynasties of the Sakas, Parthians and the Kusanas in north India, there were a large number of local chiefs who ruled in various pockets. Coins were issued by

many of these chiefdoms located in Punjab and Rajasthan. Nearly 175 types of coins have been counted dating back from the late second century B.C. to the early fourth century A.D. Similarly a large number of local issues known as Puri-Kusana coins have been found at sites in the lower Ganga valley and the Orissa coast.

We can then say that north and north-western India were ruled by several major and minor dynasties. As a result the land routes must have passed through many different kingdoms. Each ruler perhaps levied taxes on the sale of merchandise at certain centres. Merchants by and large were provided protection and trade was encouraged.

24.4 EXPANSION OF TRADE AND PRODUCTION OF COMMODITIES

One of the questions that arises is : what were the reasons responsible for the increase in trading activity in the post-Maurya period? There is no single answer as there were many reasons for this increase:

- Agriculture was now generating enough surplus. It had created such social classes which required varieties of items that could be acquired only through trade. Agricultural produce was itself now an item of trade because the majority of people living in cities did not produce their own food.
- Both Buddhism and Jainism which had a large following by now encouraged the accumulation and reinvestment of wealth and trade was one of the occupations held in high regard. Hence we find that there was one of the occupations held in high regard. Hence we find that there was a close relationship between the traders and the Buddhist **Samgha** and Buddhist monastic establishments were located at important points along trade routes.
- The expansion of urban centres meant that there was a growing class of consumers for subsistence as well as luxury goods.

Together with these internal factors was an increased demand from outside for various Indian goods. Two major empires that arose at this time were the Roman Empire in the west and the later Han Empire in China. Within the Roman Empire there was greater demand for products of the east such as spices, aromatic woods, etc. Similarly the rulers of the later Han Empire adopted an encouraging approach towards merchants and this resulted in an acceleration of contacts between India, Central Asia and China. In the section on trade routes we shall discuss how inland trading circuits linked up with external networks, but first we should analyse the evidence for craft production at this time.

A large number of inscriptions have been found at Buddhist sites all over the country. These inscriptions record donations and gifts made to the Buddhist **Samgha** but at the same time they also indicate the prosperity of certain professions and occupational groups.

Thus the inscriptions at Mathura refer to several categories of merchants such as **vanik**, **sarthavaha** and **sresthin** and to occupations of the goldsmith, jeweller, treasurer, iron-merchant, etc. In addition there are references to guilds — one of them being identified as the flour-makers guild. Information about craftsmen and guilds is also available in early Buddhist literature as well as the **Arthashastra** of Kautilya. There are references to specialised groups living together in certain villages. For example the **Jatakas** mention a border village in Kasi where a number of carpenters lived and merchants regularly visited the village for trade. Another way of procuring goods was by visiting the ports. When a ship arrived in port, merchants converged there to buy the goods and often had to pay money in advance to secure a share in the cargo.

According to the **Arthashastra** some of the craftsmen worked independently with apprentices, while others were organised into guilds. Inscriptions refer to donations made by these craftsmen and archaeological excavations provide us with actual specimens of their handiwork. Weaving was prominently represented among the crafts and cotton textiles were exported from India. There were many centres of textile production in the north including Mathura and Varanasi. One of the donations at Mathura was by the wife of a dyer. Other categories of craftsmen included jewellers, perfumers and iron-mongers. Actual finds of beads and other ornaments are prolific at early historical sites. We have already referred to Ujjain as

stones, glass, ivory and terracotta and these were in great demand from several centres in the north. Workers in ivory figure in the inscriptions at Sanchi and exquisite examples of ivory-working have fortunately been preserved. A hoard of ivory figurines was recovered during excavations at the site of Begram or ancient Kapisa in Afghanistan.

Thus we find that a diverse range of commodities were involved in trade at this time. These included luxury items such as ivories, jewellery and beads, pearls, diamonds and other precious stones as well as items of regular use such as cloth, agricultural products and iron objects. No doubt many of these were also exported and we shall deal with them separately in a later section. Wine was perhaps another item of trade. The **Arthashastra** deals in great detail with the production of fermented juices and its popularity is confirmed by the depiction of drinking scenes in the sculptures of the period, particularly from sites like Sanghol and Mathura.

24.4.1 Internal Trade

While literary sources such as the **Milindapanho** and the **Jatakas** provide information on the organisation of trade networks, further confirmation comes from archaeological artefacts such as coins, seals and sealings. The **Milindapanho** was written about the beginning of the Christian era. The original text is now lost and the present work is a Pali translation of a copy made at a very early date in Sri Lanka. Also written in Pali, the **Jatakas** are five hundred in number and narrate stories connected with the previous births of the Buddha. At the same time they provide a vivid account of the social and economic conditions of the period. From the carvings on the Buddhist monuments we know that many of these stories were known by the second-first centuries B.C. The **Jatakas** show that there were many different types of commercial transactions and many ways in which the price of a commodity was fixed. For example, horses, elephants and gems were used mainly by the ruling classes and their price was fixed by a valuer present in the court. The best horses came from West Asia and Central Asia. These were transported and sold by specialised merchants referred to as horse dealers in the early Pali and Sanskrit texts.

Traders were organised into guilds; others traded with their own money; while still others were only financiers and provided the money to trade with. The terms used for these different type of merchants also varied. A **vanik** was primarily a general trader, while a **setthi** was a financier and a **sarthavaha** was a leader of a caravan which transported goods over long distances.

In addition to these literary references is the evidence of seals, sealings and coins. A seal is a stamp either inscribed with the name of its owner or with some symbol, while its impression on any material is called a sealing. Seals were made in a variety of materials such as stone, ivory, copper or lead and were used both as identification marks as well as for securing merchandise. In the case of goods, the merchandise was first fastened with strings or rope and over the knot a lump of moist clay was applied and then stamped with a seal. The clay was then dried either in the sun or by applying indirect heat. These clay sealings with string-marks on the back have been found extensively at archaeological sites in the north.

A good indicator of trade transactions is the coinage system. In the Mauryan period silver punch-marked coins were in use together with uninscribed cast copper coins. In the post-Mauryan period, the variety, number and types of coins being minted increased rapidly. Inscriptions were introduced on coins and the technique of minting coins showed great improvement. Several thousand moulds for casting copper coins dating to 100 B.C. have been found at different localities such as Khokrakot in district Rohtak, Sunet in district Ludhiana, Taxila and Sanchi. Nearly 200 types of copper coins were issued by the local dynasties and **gana-samghas** of north India.

The Indo-Greek kings in the north-west introduced a splendid series of portrait coinage — a type that was followed in India for several centuries. These coins in silver and copper carried bilingual inscriptions, written on one side in Greek language and script and on the other in Prakrit and generally in Kharosthi script. In western India, the coins of the **Kshatrapas** are important because these show the earliest use of the Saka era which henceforth provides a firm basis for dating. Another remarkable coin series of the early centuries A.D. is that of the Kusans. In addition to those in copper, the Kusanas minted a large number of gold coins and these depict a variety of Indian, Greek and Iranian deities. This abundance of coin-types and coinage systems indicates the extensive use of money.



The **Arthashastra** refers to wages being paid in money while the **Jatakas** mention goods being purchased against securities and traders borrowing money against bonds. We also know that guilds accepted money deposits and paid an interest on these as mentioned in an inscription at Mathura. Together with the indigenous coins, foreign coins, especially Roman coins also came into the country by way of trade. Very few Roman coins have been found in the north, though imitations of these in clay known as 'bullae' occur widely at the excavated sites. Many of these 'bullae' have a loop for threading and were probably used as ornaments.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×).
- i) The cities of the sixth century B.C. were located on the banks of the major rivers.
 - ii) Indus river system had more sources of water than Ganga.
 - iii) According to the **Arthashastra**, the craftsmen worked independently, without organising into guilds.
 - iv) The coinage system can be a good indicator of trade transactions.
- 2) How would you account for the increase in trade in the post-Mauryan period? Write in 100 words.

[illegible]

- 3) Write five lines on the importance of the Ganga valley in the early historical period.

[illegible]

24.4.2 External Trade

We have mentioned earlier that maritime trade started during the Mauryan period. The early links flourished and expanded in the early centuries of the Christian era. One reason for this was the demand from the two major empires that arose at the beginning of the Christian era. In the west was the mighty Roman empire while in the east was the Han empire in China. Information about the period is thus available in many foreign sources.

One of the works that tells us a great deal about early maritime trade is the **Periplus of the Erythraean Sea**. This Greek text was written by an anonymous sailor in the first century A.D. and contains an account of the ports that he visited during his travels between the Red Sea and India. We also know of the commodities that were traded at each port from his account.

The two major ports to which trade goods were sent from the centres of north India were those of Barbarikon at the mouth of the Indus and Bharuch at the mouth of the Narmada. We have already referred to the routes along the Indus that connected Barbarikon with Punjab and Gandhara. Bharuch or Barygaza as the Greeks called it, was linked to Ujjain, Mathura and the Ganga plains. In the east, Tamluk was an important outlet for coastal trade with Andhra and Tamil Coasts.

The **Periplus** tells us that the imports in the north included brocades, coral, frankincense, glass vessels, money and some wine. The Romans are famous for the technological improvements that they made in the manufacture of glass. As a result the different varieties of glass objects made by them were highly valued in many countries including India and China. Frankincense is a gum-resin produced by a tree indigenous to Arabia. It was used as an incense and also for medicinal purposes. So far very few gold and silver Roman coins have been found in north India, although, as you will read in the next block, a large number of them have been found in peninsular India. This has led some scholars to suggest that these imported coins were melted and re-used by the Kusanas and the Ksatrapas to mint their own currency.

In exchange for these, the exports from India were spices, precious stones like turquoise, lapis lazuli and carnelian and Chinese silk and yarn. We should not assume from here that trade was controlled by the Roman merchants only. There were many partners in this trade including the Arabs, Jews, Oriental Greeks and Roman-subjects based in Egypt. In addition, Indian seamen sailed in their own ships to the ports of the Red Sea. The **Jatakas** narrate several stories of Indian merchants who undertook long sea-voyages in order to make money. This is also corroborated by references in the **Arthashastra** of Kautilya and by inscriptions. Among the donors at Buddhist monasteries an important category is that of the **navika** or mariner.

One category of goods that requires explanation is Chinese silk and yarn. Why was Chinese silk traded through India rather than being sent directly? The reason for this was the political situation. The Parthians were powerful rulers along the north-western boundary of the Indian sub-continent. There was constant hostility between them and the Roman Empire and as a result, overland routes between China and the west were disrupted.

Many of the products from China were hence traded along the land route to India.

Information about early contacts between India, Central Asia and China is to be found in Chinese histories written at this time. It is generally accepted that together with merchants Buddhism also spread to Central Asia and China around the first century B.C. - first century A.D. A series of Buddhist caves were made along the northern route to Central Asia from the first century A.D. onwards and from the third century A.D. many Buddhist texts were translated into Chinese.

So far we have said very little about early trade with countries in Southeast Asia such as Burma, Thailand and Indonesia. This is because no early written texts are available in these countries, unlike the situation in the Roman and Chinese empires. Hence, our only source of information are archaeological excavations. These show that many items of Indian workmanship such as seals and beads of semi-precious stones, ivory comb, etc., were treasured and valued by Southeast Asian communities at this time. But in the absence of written records it is difficult to say much more about the organisation of trade in the early centuries of the Christian era.

24.4.3 Principal Trade Routes

Bactria in the Oxus valley in north Afghanistan was the main centre for the international trade with Central Asia and China. From this city a route ran through Kapisa and the Kabul valley to the core region of the Kusana empire. Within the Indian sub-continent there were two major routes mentioned in the different sources. The **uttarapatha** or northern route connected the major centres of the north while the **dakshinapatha** linked the centres of peninsular India. The **uttarapatha** originated at Pushkalavati or modern Charsada and went via Taxila, Mathura, Kausambi and Varanasi to Pataliputra and from there onwards to Champa and Chandraketugarh. This ancient route was already in existence under the Mauryas and references to it occur in Greek writings. From Mathura another route branched off westward to Sindh and it was along this route that horses were brought to the north. Mathura was also connected to Ujjain and the port of Bharuch at the mouth of the Narmada. A third

route ran parallel to the river Indus and connected Taxila to Patala at the mouth of the river. A point to be noted here is that the major route followed the channel of the Ganga and there are many references to the transportation of commodities by boat along the river. This major route was linked to several minor routes, one of them going past Vaisali and Sravasti to Nepal.

24.4.4 Urban Centres

We get information about the urban centres of north India from descriptions found in early Pali and Sanskrit texts. But many of these descriptions are of a rather general nature. The best sources for the purpose however are archaeological excavations conducted at the important urban sites. These tell us in detail about the way the houses were constructed and the implements and other artefacts used by the people who lived there.

Excavations at Taxila (30 kms north-west of the modern Islamabad) were conducted many decades ago by Sir John Marshall. The excavations started in 1913 and continued for nearly twenty years. These showed that Taxila had been occupied from at least the Mauryan period onwards, though it was under the Indo-Greeks that the first planned city developed. A fortification wall was added later to this city. Fortification walls have been identified at many other sites also but generally these were made of clay and well-rammed mud. The use of burnt-brick was known and it was widely employed for various structures. Circular structures, on the other hand, were made of wedge-shaped brick.

As compared to the Mauryan period, houses of the early historical period were better made and there was extensive use of burnt-brick for walls and tiles for roofs. Artefacts of material culture found during excavations show that the settlements were more prosperous than those of the earlier period. A large number of beads were found suggesting the increased use of ornaments and jewellery. Clay was used in a variety of ways. It was required for making pots and in addition was employed for modelling human and animal figurines. Some of these figurines were produced in moulds and show intricate carving and details of ornamentation.

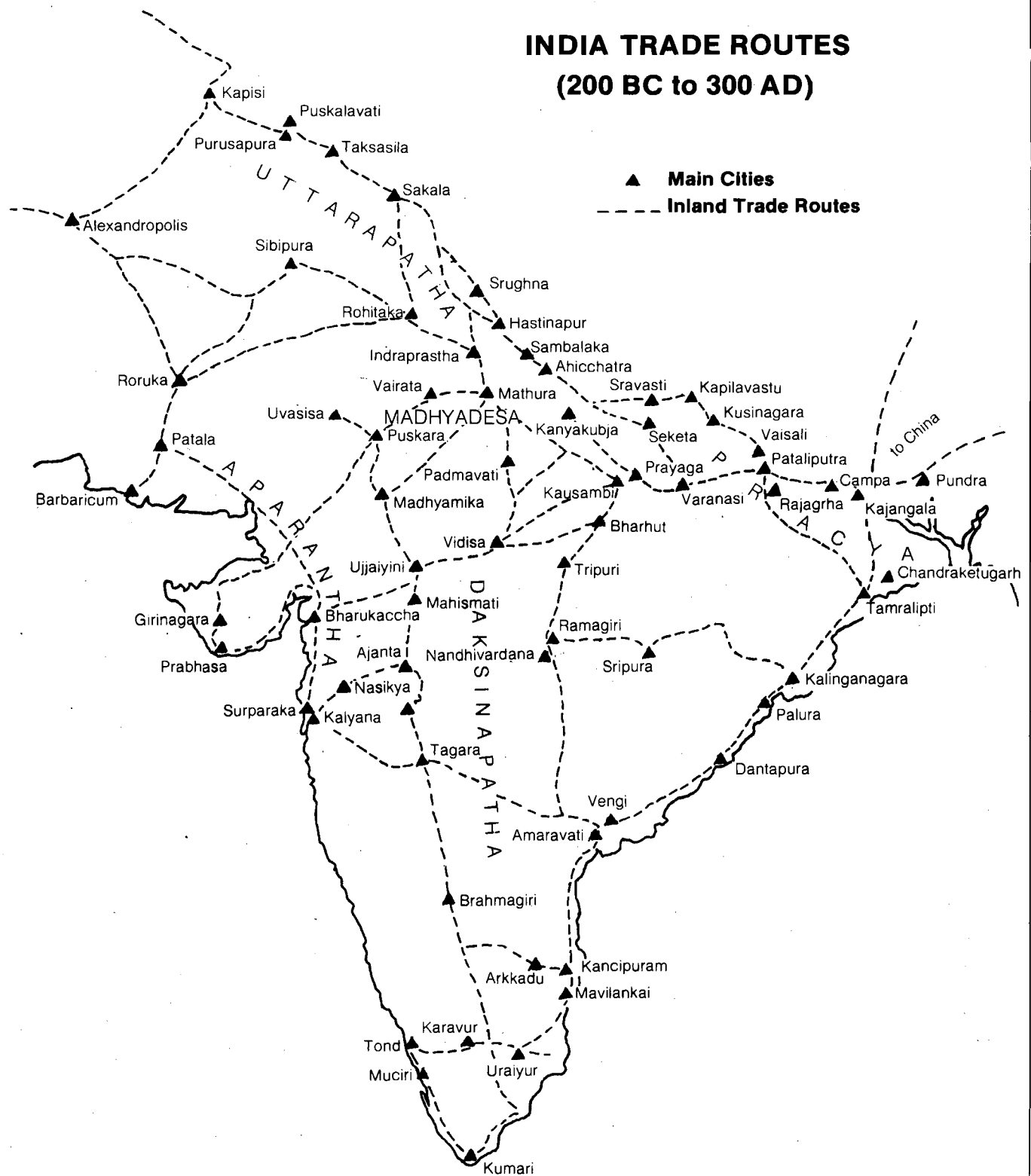
Another point to be noted is the increase in the number of urban centres. Excavations have revealed many flourishing settlements such as Purana Quila, Mathura and Kausambi on the banks of the Yamuna. Ahichhatra in Bareilly district was the capital of the north Panchalas. Rajghat in Varanasi has provided evidence for ivory-working and the manufacture of textiles at this time. Vaisali, identified with the present day Vaisali in north Bihar yielded a large number of clay seals and sealings, many of them belonging to traders and artisans. Two important sites in Bengal were Tamluk and Chandraketugarh. Excavations at Chandraketugarh showed that the site was surrounded by a mud rampart in the early centuries A.D., while Tamluk was a port-town providing an outlet to traffic along the Ganga. Further west was a fortified settlement at Ujjain which was also famous for its bead-making industry. In addition excavations at all these sites have uncovered remains of extensive brick walls and other structures.

24.5 ROLE OF RELIGION IN TRADE

We had earlier mentioned that Buddhism provided encouragement to traders and was also patronised by a large number of occupational groups. We get information on this from inscriptions found at several Buddhist sites. These are records of donations made by kings as well as by a cross-section of the population. We also know that the important Buddhist monasteries were located along the trade routes at this time.

A major centre was the region around Taxila where several Buddhist monasteries were located. Here a distinct style of art known as Gandhara art developed under the Kusanas. A second stronghold of Buddhism was the region around Mathura which was equally famous as a centre of art also. Here, however, both Buddhism and Jainism were patronised and excavations have unearthed both Buddhist and Jaina monastic remains. Another large Buddhist centre was at Sanchi near present day Bhopal. Merchants from many centres in the Deccan and the north travelled to Sanchi and made donations; their inscriptions being significant indicators of routes. The major share of the money for building the Stupa at Sanchi was provided by the residents of Ujjain. Also in central India was the Stupa at Bharhut. Here donations were made by the residents of Nasik in the Deccan as well as by those of Pataliputra and Vaisali in the north.

INDIA TRADE ROUTES (200 BC to 300 AD)



India: Century 200 B.C.
to 300 A.D.

These donations of money and land added to the wealth of the monasteries and led to a change in the role of the Buddhist **Samgha** in society. When Buddhism originated around the fifth century B.C. monks led a very simple life. With the growth of the influence of Buddhism, specific groups of Buddhist sects and teachers became very wealthy. Thus by the Kushana period we find that certain Buddhist monastic centres possessed money and land and there are many instances of monks and nuns themselves making donations of money.

One of the reasons for the division of the Buddhist **Samgha** was the dispute that arose about the interpretation of certain rules. There was an ongoing debate about whether monks could own property or not. Another question was about the defecation of the Buddha and the worship of his image. By the first century A.D. the Buddhist **Samgha** had split into two major schools known as **Mahayana** and **Hinayana**. Of these two, the **Hinayana** was the more conservative. But what is important for our purpose is that the worship of the Buddha image led to an increase in ritual observances. Monasteries now required oil for lighting lamps, incense for fragrance and silk banners for decorating the **Stupas**. Once monks started living permanently in monasteries, they required clothes. They now owned land and money and were no longer dependent on begging for their food and other necessities. Thus, gradually they became one of the major consumers of many of the items traded at this time.

Uptil now we have talked only about Buddhism and Jainism. What about Brahmanism or Hinduism? There are references in inscriptions to money given to feed brahmanas and to the performance of Vedic sacrifices. Early images of Siva and Vishnu dated to the Kusana period have also been found. But the structure and form of the Brahmanical temple developed mainly from the Gupta period onwards and it was later that the temple became the nucleus of activity in society.

24.6 POSITION OF TRADERS

Brahmanical texts in Sanskrit of the early centuries A.D. divide society into four categories, i.e. **brahmana**, **kshatriya**, **vaishya** and **sudra**. Agriculture and trade were generally prescribed to the **vaishya**, though the profession of the artisan was associated with the **sudra**. As contrasted to this, early Buddhist texts refer to a variety of ways in which society could be divided. In addition to the **varna** or caste hierarchy they also mention distinctions on the basis of work and craft. Here the division is on the basis of high and low. Agriculture, trade and cattle-keeping were considered high work. Thus in many Buddhist texts young men of good family are always associated with agriculture, trade and cattle-keeping. Similarly, accounting and writing are rated high among crafts, while leather-working, basket-making, weaving, etc. are considered low. On the whole, in Buddhist society identification was on the basis of occupations and traders has a high place in society.

We find this reflected in the inscriptions as well. The donors at the Buddhist monastic sites mention only their occupations and nowhere does the caste affiliation figure. Traders and merchants are prominently represented and guilds occur in their own right.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) According to the Greek text **Periplus**, which were the items imported into, and exported out of India?

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- 2) Why were the Chinese goods being traded from China to Europe through India? Answer in five lines.

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- 3) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×).
- i) We have no written accounts of Indian trade with the Roman and Chinese Empires.
 - ii) Large donations brought about a change in the life of Buddhist monks.
 - iii) There were two major trade routes in the early historical period — **Uttarapatha** and **Dakshinapatha**.
 - iv) The position of trades was different in the Brahmanical texts as compared to the Buddhist ones.

24.7 LET US SUM UP

To sum up, the period from 200 B.C. to A.D. 300 was perhaps the most prosperous in terms of the expansion of trade networks and increase in the number of urban centres. The major route in north India connected the centres in the north-west with ports along the Bengal coast. Linked to this were several feeder routes and the southern route that led to the Deccan and south India. In addition to urban centres, Buddhist monastic establishments were also located along these routes. This was because of the supportive role that Buddhism played at this time. Buddhism encouraged the accumulation and investment of wealth in trading ventures and at the same time the **Samgha** benefited from donations of land and money made by the devotees. This was also the period of increased demand from foreign markets, especially those of the Mediterranean region. Trade contacts with Central Asia and China opened up routes for the spread of Buddhism and several Buddhist monasteries were carved in rock along the routes. Links with Southeast Asia were also being forged and archaeological excavations are providing increasing evidence of these.

24.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) (i) ✓ (ii) × (iii) × (iv) ✓
- 2) Your answer should refer to the role played by Buddhism and Jainism in promoting trade; a growing class of consumer; and an increase in demand for Indian goods from external markets mainly Europe and China. See Sec. 24.4.
- 3) The Ganga Valley was agriculturally productive, provided readily available water for irrigation and also connected various cities thereby facilitating trade. See Sec. 24.2.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sec. 24.5
- 2) Because of constant hostility between the Parthians and the Roman Empire, the overland trade routes between China and the west were disrupted. Hence, trade between China and the west had to be done through India. See Sec. 24.5
- 3) (i) × (ii) ✓ (iii) ✓ (iv) ✓

UNIT 25 DEVELOPMENT IN RELIGION

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 Buddhism
 - 25.2.1 Expansion and Patronage
 - 25.2.2 Rise of Mahayana Buddhism
 - 25.2.3 Sects
 - 25.2.4 Centres
- 25.3 Jainism
 - 25.3.1 Spread and Patronage
 - 25.3.2 Sects
 - 25.3.3 Centres
- 25.4 Brahmanism
 - 25.4.1 New Developments
 - 25.4.2 Other Deities
- 25.5 Saivism
- 25.6 Vaishnavism
- 25.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.8 Key Words
- 25.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

25.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to briefly discuss the development of religions in India during the post-Mauryan period. After reading this unit you should be able to:

- understand the stages of change which Buddhism and Jainism went through during this period,
- understand the nature of Brahmanism,
- know about the growth of religious sects associated with Saivism and Vaishnavism, and
- follow how new ideas were assimilated by these religions.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 17 you read about the rise of Buddhism and Jainism and their development upto 200 B.C. In this unit we take into account the conditions and development of various religions during 200 B.C. to 300 A.D. The political situation of the post-Maurya period, that is, the rise of the Sungas, the Satavahanas, and the appearance of such ruling powers as those of the Indo-Greeks, Saka-Parthians and the Kushanas in the North-West influenced to an extent the course of religion during this period. For example, after the patronage which Buddhism received from Asoka, there was royal support to Brahmanism under the Sungas. Similarly, the liberal social attitude of Buddhism made the absorption of foreigners into Indian Society comparatively easy, thus leading to social assimilation. This assimilation could very well have influenced the support extended to Buddhism by the Indo-Greeks.

We already know that Buddhism had a large following among the merchant communities. Hence, an increase in trade and commerce during this period helped the growth of Buddhism. The traders, though involved in trade, also left traces of their personal religions in the areas they visited. We will see how all these aspects brought changes in the religions of the period. This period witnessed certain changes in orthodox Brahmanism and also in the appearance of certain sects associated with Saivism and Vaishnavism.

Thus, the major points of change in religion in the post-Mauryan period were:

- After the fall of the Mauryan Empire Buddhism probably faced some hostility from the Sungas but gradually it established a large network of centres and started expanding to neighbouring countries.
- Buddhism started to split into distinct groups on the basis of ideological and theological differences — the major one's being the **Mahayana** and **Hinayana**.
- Jainism too acquired a following and had its own organisation, although it was not as widespread as Buddhism.
- Within Jainism too there were differences and they finally led to the division of the Jaina order into two major groups, i.e., the **Svetambaras** and the **Digambaras**.
- What is known as Brahmanical religion, which is distinguished sharply from heterodox beliefs like Buddhism and Jainism, became very different in this period with the popularity of Vaishnava and Saiva sects.
- Both orthodox and heterodox religious beliefs assimilated ideas from both inside and outside the country. Some common elements, like deification of human beings and worship of images, came to characterise both orthodox and heterodox religions.

25.2 BUDDHISM

The growth of Buddhism had suffered a minor setback during the Sunga-Kanva period. This was because both the Sungas and the Kanvas who succeeded the Mauryas in Magadha professed Brahmanical faith.

The Buddhist work **Divyavadana** accuses Pushyamitra Sunga as a veritable enemy of Buddhism. It is said that he attempted to destroy the Kukuta Arama monastery at Pataliputra. According to this source he also fixed a prize of 100 **dinaras** for the head of every monk.

However, although these rulers may have been personally opposed to Buddhism, it does not mean that social support to Buddhism declined on any significant scale. In fact, the Bharhut **Stupa** in Central India was built during the rule of the Sungas. The Sanchi **Stupa** was enlarged twice its size and the gateways (**torana**) and the railings were added in their period only. The version of **Divyavadana** seems to be highly exaggerated, but there is no doubt that the kind of royal patronage Buddhism had enjoyed during the Mauryan rule was no more there at the time of the Sungas and the Kanvas.

25.2.1 Expansion and Patronage

We notice expansion of Buddhism in all parts of India during the period 200 B.C. to 300 A.D. Buddhism gained a strong foothold in the north western India. Many of the foreigners like the Indo-Greeks and the Kushanas, who invaded India during this time accepted Buddhism.

Among the Indo-Greek kings, it was Menander who figures prominently as the ruler who was drawn towards the doctrines of Buddhism. He accepted Buddhism. He is called king Milinda of Sakala in a Buddhist work which gives the story of how he was converted. This work, known as '**Milinda-Panha**' (Question of Milinda) was written in the form of a dialogue between Menander and the Buddhist monk Nagasena.

Many Kushana kings adopted Buddhism. For example, Kujula Kadphises and Kaniska-I were followers of Buddhism. It was in Kaniska's rule that Buddhism reached a supreme position. During his period the Fourth Buddhist Council was convened on the advice of Parsva — the Buddhist monk. Though there is some controversy regarding the place of the meeting, it is generally accepted, on the evidence of many contemporary authorities, that it was held somewhere in Kashmir. Vasumitra acted as its president. A thorough discussion took place on some difficult passages of the scriptures and these discussions were compiled in the form of commentaries known as '**Vibhasha sastras**'. It was in this council that Buddhism got split into **Hinayana** and **Mahayana**.

Kaniska-I helped to propagate Buddhism in different parts of the country. For example, he built a **Stupa** and a monastery at Peshawar which served as a great centre of Buddhist learning and culture. However, in this period monks from India carried the doctrines of Buddha also to Central Asia and China.

In the Deccan the Satavahana kings and Kshatrapa rulers of western India patronised Buddhism. Many **Stupas** were built and were endowed with munificent gifts. For example, the **Amaravati Stupa** was enlarged and enclosed in richly carved marble slabs in the days of the Satavahana King Pulumavi.

Along the Western Coast, many caves were excavated on the Western ghats by the Satavahanas and the Kshatrapas. They functioned as shelters for Buddhist monks and as monasteries. These rock cut caves are found at places like Nasik, Karle, Bhaja, Gunnar, Kanheri, etc.

Some traces of Buddhism are also noticed in the Tamil country during this period. The early cave inscriptions from the Tamil country refer to some places occupied by the Buddhists. These inscriptions also record donations by the lay worshippers.

25.2.2 Rise of Mahayana Buddhism

The growth of **Mahayana** Buddhism contributed to the further development of Buddhism as a popular faith all over India and beyond her frontiers. The religious emotions of a number of people, with different origins and cultural affiliations gradually transformed Buddha into a God. In the early centuries of the Christian era the installation and worship of Buddha images came into vogue. This paved the way for the advent of **Mahayana** Buddhism.

Mahayana Buddhism originated in about the first century B.C. in the Andhra region. It became a recognisable form of Buddhism at the time of Kaniska and then spread all over North India in the first and second centuries A.D. However, due to the opposition from orthodox Buddhism it could not make much headway in the beginning. It was with the advent of Nagarjuna, the most outstanding exponent of **Mahayana** that it started gaining popularity. Although **Mahayana** Buddhism originated in the first century B.C. the formal division of the Buddhist **samgha** into **Hinayana** and **Mahayana** on the basis of sharp doctrinal differences seems to have taken place after the fourth Buddhist council at the time of Kaniska-I. Literally, **Hinayana** means "Lesser Vehicle" and **Mahayana**, "Greater Vehicle", but these were terms which were invented to show the superiority of **Mahayana** over **Hinayana**. The essential difference lay in the **Mahayana** belief, first preached by a Buddhist sect called Mahasanghika, that every being could aspire to **Buddhahood** and could attain it through various stages as **Bodhisattva**. One could become a **Bodhisattva** by performing the meritorious acts or **Paramitas**. Other features associated with **Mahayana** faith are: belief in **sunyata** or void or non-reality of objects; belief in **mantras**, belief in numerous Buddhas and **Bodhisattvas** and the practice of worshipping gods and goddesses. Most of these beliefs and practices, the **Hinayanists** thought, were not expounded by the Buddha himself. They also thought that it was not practical to teach that the ideal of **Buddhahood** could be attained by every being.

25.2.3 Sects

With the spread of Buddhism to different parts of the country many sects appeared. For example, the **Theravadins** had their centre of activity at Kausambi; Mathura was the centre for the **Sarvastivadins**; and the **Bhadra Yanika** sect flourished at Nasik and Kanheri. The origin of these sects may not have been originally due to differences in the doctrines. In fact, what contributed to their origin and growth were factors related to geographical diversities of the country, attitudes of various communities at the local levels and perhaps lack of coordination between the various exponents of the sects. Under the Satavahanas, the Dhanyakataka (Amaravati) region became the most important stronghold of **Mahayana** Buddhism whereas the **Sthaviravadins** were popular in the north.

These sects brought about certain changes in Buddhism. Some of these were:

- Whereas earlier Buddha was considered as a teacher only, now in the **Mahayana** sect he was worshipped as God. This brought about a change in the form in which he was worshipped. For example, earlier in sculpture he was represented through a pair of foot prints; a white elephant and a flower, etc. But now people began to worship Buddha images and idols.
- The concepts **Bodhisattvas** also underwent a change. For example, according to one sect the **Bodhisattva** was an incarnation of the Buddha whereas another sect depicted **Bodhisattva** as an unselfish individual working for the good of all.

- Now the idea of successive re-births was strengthened. It emphasised that one could accumulate merit through successive births.
- Merit now could also be transferred from one person to another person by conducting appropriate pious acts.

25.2.4 Centres

The earlier religious and pilgrimage centres remained as popular centres even in this period:

- Barhut, Bodhgaya and Sanchi continued to be celebrated places of pilgrimage during the Sunga period and later.
- Purushapura was a great centre of Buddhist culture under the Kushans. However, Taxila continued to be the most important centre in this region. Infact, in the entire region of Gandhara which included Purushapura and Taxila, Buddhism was so important that it gave rise to a regional school of art called Gandhara art.
- Mathura was a major centre of Buddhism and like Gandhara produced its own school of art. **Bodhisattva** images of Mathura were taken to far-off places. In western Deccan, Nasik, Kanheri and Karle numerous other monasteries were excavated on the hills during this period and provided residence to Buddhist monks.
- In the eastern Deccan, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda were the famous centres where Buddhist art flourished. The **Mahachaitya** of Nagarjunakonda was a place of pilgrimage among the Buddhists all over India.

Some of these centres developed into great educational centres also. For example Taxila, Mathura, Benaras and Nalanda emerged as centres of Buddhist learning. Taxila attracted students from many parts of the country. It offered the highest learning in humanities, sciences, crafts, martial arts, law and medicine.

25.3 JAINISM

Jainism did not spread as fast as Buddhism. Further, royal patronage to Jainism was not as extensive as it was in the case of Buddhism. In spite of these difficulties, the monks were active and organised missions to spread Jainism.

By the early centuries of the Christian era it had consolidated its position in India. But Jainism, unlike Buddhism, did not attempt to spread its doctrines outside India.

25.3.1 Spread and Patronage

Generous patronage was extended to Jainism by some kings, and the name of Kharavela, the ruler of Kalinga, stands foremost in this regard. Not only he and his queen practised Jainism but they dedicated some caves for the use of the Jaina monks in the Udayagiri hills.

In the Kushana period Jainism was popular in Mathura. The Mathura School of Art produced many images of the **Tirthankaras** and other objects of worship for the Jains.

In the Tamil country the Tamil kings dedicated some caves to the Jains. Athiyar Neduman Anji dedicated a cave to the Jains at Jambai in South Arcot district. The cave at Sittanavasal (Pudukkottai district) was dedicated by the local people to a Jaina monk. This indicates the popularity of the Jaina faith among the people of that region.

Jaina monks organised many missions to spread Jainism. These missions were originally intended to provide relief and shelter to Jaina monks who were suffering from famine or drought. However, these relief missions ultimately turned into religious missions for the spread of Jainism.

The first such mission was organised in the Mauryan period. According to tradition, Bhadrabahu, contemporary of Chandragupta Maurya, migrated to provide shelter to the monks. He, with the King Chandragupta Maurya, went south and established a centre at Sravanabelgola in Karnataka. From this place the Jains spread to different parts of the Tamil country and the Andhra region.

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A **Svetambara** tradition mentions in the time of Kharavela, the migration of Jaina monks from Magadha to the eastern Andhra coast. This tradition is supported by a late inscription from Hathigumpha cave on the Udayagiri hills near Bhuvaneshwar.

Another tradition mentions the migration of Jainas to Mathura. The ruins of the Kankali Tila at Mathura and a number of dedicatory inscriptions testify to the existence of Jainism in Mathura during the first-second centuries A.D.

The story of Kalakacharya refers to the movement of Jainas to Malwa as early as the first century B.C.

From the evidence of Junagadh inscription it is clear that by the early centuries of the Christian era Jainism had spread to Gujarat.

25.3.2 Sects

The **Svetambara** and **Digambara** sects were known from as early as the second century B.C. Those who discarded all garments and went about naked were called **Digambaras** and those who wore a white garment were named **Svetambaras**. There is very little doctrinal differences between these two sects. This continued in this period also.

The **Yapaniya** developed as another Jaina sect around the first century A.D. It was probably founded by Kalasa, a monk of **Svetambara** sect at Kalayanagara. A significant feature of this sect was that it though that even women could attain **moksha** and that **kevalins** should take their food in morsals.

By and large Jainism remained faithful to its original doctrines and hence the number of its adherents remained fairly constant.

25.3.3 Centres

Among the many Jaina centres, Rajagriha or Rajgir developed into an important centre during the first and second centuries A.D. Vajra Muni of the **Svetambara** sect was associated with this place.

Mathura was another important centre. From the sculptures found in Mathura and from the dedicated inscriptions on them, it is evident that the merchant class patronised Jainism here on a significant scale. It continued to be an important centre of Jainism for many centuries. According to a late tradition, Ujjain was another important centre of Jainism in this period.

In the northwest, Sirkap in Taxila grew into a Jaina centre from the early centuries of the Christian era in addition to being a major Buddhist centre. It had a large Jain establishment. Similarly, Broach and Sopara on the western coast were great centres and monks frequented there.

In Orissa, Udayagiri and Khandagiri hills near Bhuvaneshwar were other centres from the Mauryan times, and they continued to flourish even after the rule of Kharavela.

In the Tamil country, Madurai and Sittannaval may be considered as important centres. Large Jaina establishments existed at these places in the second century B.C. and afterwards.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Mark which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (x)?
 - a) Barhut Stupa was built during the Sunga period. ()
 - b) The Indo-Greek King Menander was converted to Buddhism. ()
 - c) Jainism did not flourish in the Tamil country during the second century B.C. ()
 - d) Yapaniya was a sect of Buddhism. ()
 - e) Hathigumpha was a Jaina centre under Kharavela. ()
- 2) Explain the basic aspects of **Mahayanism**. (Answer in five lines).
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- 3) Write a note in about five lines on important Jaina centres.

25.4 BRAHMANISM

It has already been mentioned that Brahmanism received support from several kings during this period. Contemporary sources refer to the performance of certain Vedic rituals by the kings. For example Pushyamitra Sunga performed two horse sacrifices (**Asvamedha Yajna**). Satavahana-I of the Satavahana dynasty performed **Asvamedha**, **Rajasuya** and a few other sacrifices. The Chola and the Pandya chiefs of the Tamil country are also said to have performed many sacrifices.

25.4.1 New Developments

Brahmanism too acquired many new features during this period and we see the gradual crystallization of what may be called Puranic Hinduism. The central feature of this was worship of gods and goddesses and not performance of sacrifices. For example, the idea of a supreme deity gained strength and this deity was either Vishnu or Siva. This sharply divided the religious pantheon into two groups and led to the development of Saivism and Vaishnavism. Though both the sects believed that salvation could be attained only by devotion or **bhakti**, there was sharp division among the devotees of the two deities. There also arose the concept of trinity of gods. All the gods in the Brahmanical pantheon were now grouped under three major gods with Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the protector and Siva as destroyer. Though these three deities had their origins in the Vedic age, their importance and significance rose to new heights in this period. While Siva and Vishnu attracted a large following, in the case of Brahma it was not so.

The characteristic changes apparent in this period were:

- the shift from the pure ritual to **bhakti** or devotion, and
- assimilation of some of the local traditions into the Brahmanical religion.

Vaishnavism, for example, absorbed a number of different gods like the Vedic Vishnu, deified sage Narayana and deified heroes Vasudeva and Balarama. The epic heroes Rama and Krishna were accepted and they gained an enviable position among the Brahmanical deities. The Tamil deities, mentioned in the Sangam literature, were adopted into the Brahmanical faith. In the same way some of the local deities of north India were also admitted into the Brahmanical pantheon.

25.4.2 Other Deities

A variety of deities were also worshipped. Among them Brahma, Agni, Surya and Indra were some of the popular ones. The four guardian deities (**dikpalas**) namely, Yama, Varuna, Kubera and Vasava were also worshipped. Beside these:

- Animals like elephant, horse and cow were worshipped,
- The Naga or Serpent worship was popular in almost all parts of the country, and
- Many trees and tree spirits were also worshipped.

25.5 SAIVISM

The origin of Saivism can be traced back to the pre-Vedic times and by the early centuries of the Christian era it was a popular sect in almost all parts of India. Siva was the principle deity of this sect and was worshipped in the **linga** (phallus) form. This form of worship seems to have been popular from the beginning of the Christian era. Siva was also worshipped in his human form, the descriptions of which are found in some literary texts.

Saivism also received some royal support during this period. Among the Kushana kings, Wema Kadphises was an ardent devotee of Siva. On the reverse of his coins is found a representation of Siva holding a trident. Although Kaniska was a Buddhist, the reverse of some types of his coins bore the image of Siva. Worship of Siva was very popular in the Deccan from the early days. We find reference to Siva worship in the Prakrit text, **Gathasaptasati** of the Satavahana King Hala and one of the earliest stone sculptures of the **linga** comes from eastern Andhra Pradesh.

In the Tamil country, Saivism was well rooted. The Tamil Sangam works refer to Siva as the greatest of all the gods (**mamudu mudalvan**). Many of his exploits and his attributes are known from the Sangam works which also mention his form and other qualities. For example, he is described as having matted hair and wearing tiger skin. He was also known as the deity who destroyed the three heavenly cities (**Tripurantaka**).

Along with Siva many other deities were also worshipped and thus came to be formed the Saivite pantheon. Siva's consort Parvati assumed a place of importance and was adored as '**Sakti**'. The idea that from her emanated all energy was now introduced. She was also considered the mother of Skanda and Ganesa. She was worshipped in her ferocious form as Durga. In the Satavahana kingdom she was also worshipped as Gauri, another form of Parvati.

Skanda worship became popular in this period. He was regarded as the son of Siva. He was identified with the leader of the forces of the Gods. Kartikeya and Kumara were identified with him. In the Tamil country he was worshipped in the Muruga form. Many of his attributes and his temples are known from the Sangam literature.

A less popular deity in this period was Ganesa, the elder brother of Skanda. He was the leader of the **Ganas** (hosts of Siva) and was also known as Vinayaka.

Among the Saiva sects the most popular and well represented sect was the Pasupata sect. It was started by Lakulisa in Gujarat sometime in the second century A.D. and Pasupata ascetics spread to different parts of the country. Siva was worshipped in the form of Pasupati. The Kapalika and the Kalamuka sects developed much later. All these sects emphasised that Siva was the supreme god.

25.6 VAISHNAVISM

Vaishnavism was another popular sect of Brahmanism followed by a larger group of people in all parts of India. The principal deity of this sect was Vishnu who is referred to as the protector in the Brahmanical religion. The cult of Vishnu in the early period was known by the name Bhagavatism, which was developed from the Vedic cult Vasudeva-Krishna.

Bhagavatism owed its origin to the **Upanishadas**. It arose around the Mathura region. It stressed upon the idea of a supreme god called '**Hari**' and sacrifices and other rituals were regarded as of minor importance. Devotion to Vishnu was considered as the supreme virtue. For quite sometime it was confined to the Mathura region. By the beginning of the Christian era it spread to different regions in India. Inscriptions testifying to the worship of Vasudeva are found in Maharashtra, Rajaputana and Central India.

Vasudeva who was the central figure in the Bhagavata cult came to acquire an important position in the Brahmanical pantheon. Earlier he was considered equal to deities like Dharma and Indra. In the second century A.D., in the Satavahana kingdom, Gautamiputra Satakarni was described as equal to Balarama, Kesava, Arjuna and Bhimasena, the epic heroes.

It was sometime before the second century B.C., that the Vishnu and Narayana were united and identified as one deity. This kind of amalgamation probably helped Brahmanism to check the spread of Buddhism. The Bhagavata cult, centring around the worship of Vasudeva and others was also a part of Vaishnavism.

Kings like Demetrius and Menander were followers of Buddhism but some of the Indo-Greeks also embraced Bhagavatism. For example, from the Besnagar Pillar Inscription we know that Heliiodorus of Takshasila (Taxila) who was an envoy of Indo-Greek King Antialcidas to the court of a Sunga ruler was a follower of the Bhagavata cult and erected a pillar with **Garuda**, the emblem of Vishnu, at Besnagar (Vidisa) near Bhopal in honour of Vasudeva.

In the Tamil country also the worship of Vishnu was very popular. His different qualities and attributes are mentioned in the Tamil Sangam works. He is identified with Krishna. He was also worshipped in his **avatars** (incarnations) as Rama and Balarama.

Vishnu, the chief deity of the Vaishnava sect, had manifested himself in many **avatars**. Vishnu, was thus worshipped also in his **avatara** forms. Krishna, Rama and Balarama were most respected **avatars** of Vishnu. But other **avatars** like Narasimha and Varaha were also worshipped.

The emblems associated with Vishnu were also worshipped. Thus, Garuda, the **vahana** of Vishnu and **Chakra**, the circular weapon, came to be held in veneration. Garuda, his emblem, was worshipped and pillars with Garuda emblem were set up to mark a place as sacred for the Vaishnavas.

Lakshmi, Vishnu's consort was also now worshipped. Many of Vaishnava religious ideas occur in the epics **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**. Some of the most important ideas like the theory of **Karma** are explained in the **Bhagavat Gita**, a work supposed to have been incorporated in **Mahabharata** during this period. It emphasised that one has to do his worldly duties according to one's status in the society as prescribed in the scriptures. This was expected to ultimately lead him to liberation.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the important aspects of Vaishnavism in 100 words.

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- 2) Write about five lines on the new developments in Brahmanism during this period.

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- 3) Mark which of the following statements is right (✓) or wrong (×).

- i) The popular cults became very important in Brahmanical religion during this period.

India: Century 200 B.C.
To 300 A.D.

- ii) The concept of 'Avatara' in Vaishnavism was perhaps borrowed from Buddhism.
- iii) The worship of God Siva evolved from the Rigvedic God Rudra.
- iv) One of the important developments in Brahmanism during this period was the growing importance of 'Bhakti' cult.

25.7 LET US SUM UP

In Unit 17 you have read that in the period around the 6th century B.C. Buddhism, Jainism and other heterodox sects emerged as a challenge to Brahmanical orthodoxy. But by the 2nd century A.D. these heterodox movements had witnessed many changes and developments and assumed complex forms. Though royal patronage existed in some cases, the main initiative for their spread came mainly from the monks and preachers.

This period witnessed a revival of Brahmanism which assimilated certain ideas from other religions. The number of deities increased. Many earlier prominent deities lost their importance whereas many others gained importance. An important development in Brahmanical religion was the emergence of various cults—Saiva and Vaishnava being the prominent ones.

25.8 KEY WORDS

Avatara: Incarnation of god. It is believed that god (Vishnu) taking different forms like Matsya, Varaha, Rama, Krishna, etc. appeared in this World in periods of crisis to save it from total destruction.

Brahmanism: It is a term which is used to denote a wide range of religious and philosophical ideas, beliefs, rituals and gods and goddesses. When it is reflected in written texts, it generally accepts the authority of the Vedas and considers the Brahmanas as the highest Varna in society, and is opposed to heterodox ideas.

Monastery: A place in which a group of monks live together and perform religious practices.

Sculptures: Different artistic figures or objects made of solid materials like stone, wood, clay, etc.

Sect: A group following a religious faith who have separated from a larger group and follow a particular set of religious beliefs.

Stupa: Memorial monument built over the remains of Buddha of his disciples and worshipped by the Buddhists.

25.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) (a) ✓ (b) ✓ (c) × (d) × (e) ✓
- 2) You have to elaborate the doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism, See Sub-sec. 25.2.2.
- 3) Your answer should include the names and importance of some main Jain centres.
See Sub-sec. 25.3.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) You have to write about the doctrines of Vaishnavism, the development in Vaishnavism during this period, the different forms of Vishnu, etc.
See Sec. 25.6
- 2) Your answer should include the importance of 'Bhakti' in Brahmanism, the assimilation of some local traditions in Brahmanical religion, etc. See Sub-sec. 25.4.1.
- 3) (i) ✓ (ii) ✓ (iii) ✓ (iv) ✓

UNIT 26 ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 Background
- 26.3 Architecture
 - 26.3.1 Residential Architecture
 - 26.3.2 Temples and Towers
 - 26.3.3 Stupas
 - 26.3.4 Rock-cut Architecture
- 26.4 Sculptural Art
 - 26.4.1 Gandhara School
 - 26.4.2 Mathura Art
 - 26.4.3 Amaravati Art
- 26.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 26.6 Key Words
- 26.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

26.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to :

- familiarise yourself with important trends of art and architectural activities between 200 B.C. to 300 A.D.
- learn about the techniques and styles adopted in the fields of architecture and sculpture,
- distinguish between the major characteristics and forms of the Gandhara, Mathura and Amravati schools of art, and
- learn about the impact of religious and social conditions on art and architecture of the period.

26.1 INTRODUCTION

In some of the earlier Units (Nos. 3, 10, 11) we have seen how artistic forms had started emerging and to what extent they reflected the culture of a period. Works of art which were related to work processes of daily life and were not exclusively produced for a privileged group of society were many. They are found in the forms of rock paintings, terracotta figurines, toys, etc. Gradually works of art, manufactured by specialist craftsmen, came to be produced for exclusive purposes. The Mauryan period witnessed production of splendid specimens of art by the state. With the emergence of social groups who could extend substantial patronage for production of specimens of art, new trends in art activities came about. In the post-Mauryan period, patronage by different social groups was the main reason behind the phenomenon that art activities became so widespread all over India and beyond; it was no longer high art exclusively patronized by the state. There was also, from the Mauryan period onward, a shift toward using **non-perishable material i.e. stone as a medium of creative expression**. There was also constant interaction in this period with those art forms that flourished beyond the frontiers of the Indian sub-continent. There emerged various schools of art. In this unit we shall discuss the main characteristics of Gandhara and Mathura art forms along with those of **Sarnath** and **Amaravati**. Most of the art forms were inspired by Buddhism and Jainism and very few Brahmanical monuments are to be found. This unit also takes into account the architectural and sculptural aspects of various **Stupas, viharas** and caves etc.

26.2 BACKGROUND

During the Mauryan period sculpture and architecture had reached a developed stage. The Asokan pillars; the animals and carvings on the pillars — all represent mature art forms. A unique feature of the specimens of Mauryan art fashioned in stone is the polish and the smooth, glassy surface not to be found during any other period. In addition to the animal figures, the most famous piece of art is the figure of Yakshini from Didarganj, Patna. This superb art piece tells us about the hairstyle, ornaments and dress of women during that period. The Mauryan levels at sites which have been excavated have yielded a large number of terracotta figurines. They indicate that artistic creations were not confined to the Imperial level alone, and even when Mauryan Imperial art declined and new forms of art emerged, the practice of producing terracotta figurines on a substantial scale continued.

In the field of architecture we get information about Chandragupta's wooden palace from Megasthenes. Excavations at Pataliputra have revealed wooden walls and columns. We also have references about the construction of **Stupas** during the Mauryan period from the accounts of Fa-heing, Hiuen-Tsang and in Buddhist literature. Sanchi, Sarnath, Taxila and Bharhut were some of the religious centres in which **Stupas** may have been originally built in the Mauryan period, and additions were made to them in the later period.

In the period between 200 B.C.– 300 A.D. certain general characteristics of art may be highlighted :

- 1) Art activities in this period were mostly related to religions practised in this period and symbols and units associated with them.
- 2) The Buddha image which began to be sculpted in this period was a departure from earlier representations of him in the form of Bodhi tree, **Stupa**, foot prints, etc. Making of images for worship became common among other religions as well.
- 3) The construction of **Stupas**, **Chaityas** and **Viharas** became popular.
- 4) The art forms and all of their symbolic representations were not exclusive to any particular religion. For example, the Bharhut and Sanchi **Stupas** not only depict scenes from the life of the Buddha but also the reliefs of Yakshas, Yakshinis, Nagas and other popular deities.
- 5) Similarly, we find that the artists, in order to decorate the **Stupas**, carved many scenes which they observed in nature along with religious ideas. In fact, these are examples of secular art forms.
- 6) Because of regular interactions with other cultures in this period we also find elements of non-Indian art in the artistic creations of this period. This is particularly true of the Gandhara region which produced art typical to the region, in which many different elements came to be assimilated.

Let us now examine in some detail the various aspects of art and architecture of this period.

26.3 ARCHITECTURE

The architecture of this period can be broadly divided in two categories :

- i) Residential structures
- ii) Religious monuments

Under the first category we have very few surviving monuments since in the initial phase they were built of perishable materials like wood. However, a number of monuments have survived on unearthed through excavations which come under the second category.

26.3.1 Residential Architecture

In Block 4 (Unit 15) we have already discussed the pattern of city life on the basis of both literary and archaeological sources. We get similar kind of information for this period also. For example, the **Milinda Panha** describes a city with moats, ramparts, gate houses,

towers, well laidout streets, markets, parks, lakes and temples. There are references to buildings of several storeys with wagon-vaulted roofs and verandas — mostly constructed of wood. This description to an extent is corroborated by archaeological sources. However, in the countryside not much change is noticed in architectural style or types of hutments.

26.3.2 Temples and Towers

For this period, we have very insufficient data on temple structures from excavations. The earliest known temples for this period are :

- The temple at **Jhandial** (Taxila)
- The Sankarshana temple at **Nagari** (Rajasthan)
- The temple at **Besnagar** (Madhya Pradesh)
- An apsidal temple at **Nagarjunakonda** (Andhra Pradesh).

We know from Fa-hien's account, written several centuries, later of the existence of a tower at Purushapura (Peshawar). It was a grand structure with 13 storeys surmounted by an iron column with imposing umbrellas. The construction of this tower is attributed to Kanishka-I.

In fact the construction of temples in which deities were inshrined for worship became common only at a later date and the Buddhist **Stupas** and other structures were the common forms of religious architecture in this period.



2. Jhandial Temple

26.3.3 Stupas

The practice of preserving the remains of an important personality below accumulated earth was long in existence. Buddhist art adopted this practice and the structure built over such a site was known as **Stupa**. According to Buddhist sources, the remains of the Buddha's body were divided into eight parts and placed under the **Stupas**. These during the time of Asoka, were dug out and redistributed which led to the construction of other **Stupas** — the sacred places of Buddhism. The worship of **Stupas** led to their ornamentation and a specific type of architecture developed for their construction.

The **Stupas** had the shape of a bowl turned upside down. At the top, which was a bit flat, used to be its **harmika**, i.e. the abode of the Gods. It was here that the urns containing the remains of the Buddha or a great personality connected with the religion was placed in a gold or silver casket. A wooden rod (**Yashti**) was placed in its middle and the bottom of the rod was fixed on the top of the **Stupa**. On the top of this rod were placed three small umbrella type discs symbolising respect, veneration and magnanimity. Let us briefly discuss some of the prominent **Stupas**:

- i) **Bodha Gaya** (Bihar)

Fifteen kilometres from Gaya is the site where Lord Buddha gained 'knowledge' (**bodhi**) and it was here that Asoka got a '**Bodhi-Manda**' constructed. No trace of the original construction has survived. We have only the remains of the stone pillars constructed during the Sunga period like the railing pillars found around other **Stupas** and they too have sculpture the panels in relief. They illustrate stories from the Buddhist **Jatakas**.

ii) **Sanchi Stupa** (Madhya Pradesh)

Sanchi is about 14 kilometers from Vidisa (**Bhilsa**) and is perhaps the most famous **Stupa** site in India. It has three **Stupas** all with gateways around them. But the most famous is the **Great Stupa** which was originally made of brick in Asoka's time (C. 250 B.C.). During the Sunga period this was later on nearly doubled in circumference in 150 B.C. The bricks of Asokan times were replaced by stones, and a '**Vedika**' was also constructed around it. Four gates, one in each direction, were added to beautify it. From the Southern gate we get an inscription from its architrave which tell us that it was donated by King Satakarni and the incision work was done by those craftsmen who worked in ivory.

The northern gate and the panels depict stories from the **Jatakas**. The reliefs of Sanchi display (among other representations) the following quite prominently :

- 1) The four great events of the Buddha's life, i.e. birth, attainment of knowledge, **dharmachakra** — **pravartana** and **Mahaparinirvana**.
- 2) Representations of birds and animals like lion, elephant, camel, ox, etc. are abundant. Some of the animals are shown with riders in heavy coats and boots.
- 3) Lotus and wishing-vines have been prominently and beautifully carved out as ornamentation, and
- 4) Unique representation of forest animals in a manner which looks as if the whole animal world turned out to worship the Buddha.

iii) **Bharhut Stupa**

This **Stupa** was located 21 kilometers south of Satna in Madhya Pradesh. The main **Stupa** structure no longer exists.

The important features of this **Stupa** structures, remains from which are now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta and other museums are :

- Gateways or **toranas** which are imitations in stone of wooden gateways.
- Railings spreading out from the gateways. They also are imitation, in stone, of post and rail fence, but the stone railings of Bharhut have, on top, a heavy stone border (coping).
- Uprights or posts of these railings have carvings of **Yakshas**, **Yakshis** and other divinities who come to be associated with Buddhism. Some of these divinities have inscriptions on them, giving their identifications.
- There are, as in other **Stupa** railings, representations of Buddhist themes like **Jataka** stories in combination with various natural elements.

iv) **Amaravati**

Located 46 kilometres from Guntoor, the **Stupa** was built with white marble. Though the **Stupa** itself has completely disappeared its sculptured panels have been preserved in Madras and British Museums. The **Stupa** was primarily built with the help of the City-Chief and the donations from the public.

This magnificent **Stupa** was 42 metre in diameter and its height was about 29 metres. It contained a circular prayer path which was 10 metres high and was made of stone. **Vedika** pillars had beautiful carvings of garlanded gods, and Bodhi-tree, **Stupa**, **dharmachakra** and the events from the life of Lord Buddha and stories from the **Jatakas**.

The entrance gate (**torana**) of the **Stupa** depicts four lions on the **Vedika**. Lotuses have also been carved over the pillars. A number of images have also been found from the Amravati **Stupa**. In the earlier stage Buddha was represented only through symbols but from first century A.D. some Buddha images began to be found along with their symbols.

v) **Nagarjunakonda**

The Nagarjunakonda **Stupa** was built in a style different from that of North India. Here two circular walls, one at the hub and the other at the outer end, were joined by spoke like walls and the intervening space was filled with mud or small stones or pieces of bricks. The diameter of this **Stupa** was 30 metres and the height was 18 metres. The outer casing of the drum consisted of richly carved marble slabs. The hemispherical top of the drum was decorated with lime and mortar work. The four rectangular projections, one at each cardinal point, supported a row of five free standing pillars.

The importance of this **Stupa** is because of the beautiful panels which illustrate episodes from the life of the Buddha. The most important scenes are :

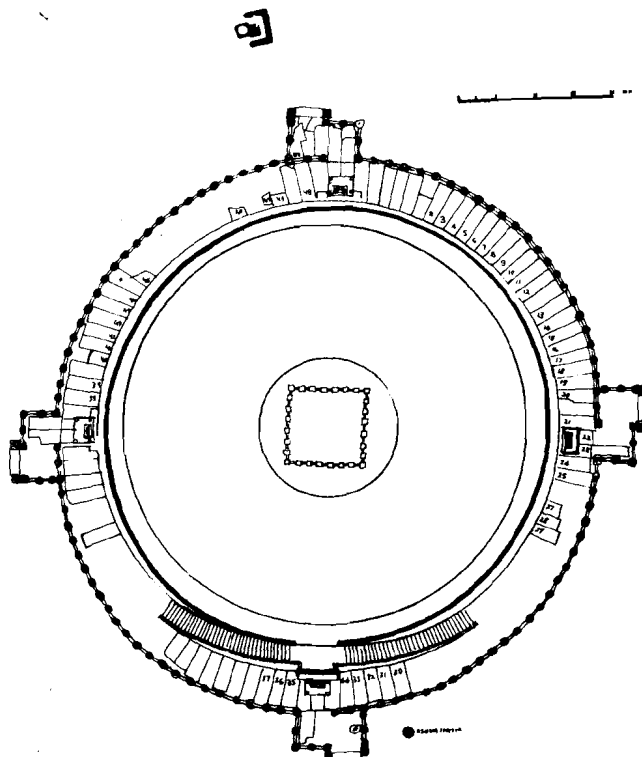
- 1) Gods praying to **Boddhishva** to take birth on the earth.
- 2) Buddha's entry into womb in the form of a white elephant.
- 3) Birth of the Buddha under a flowering teak tree, etc.

vi) Taxila

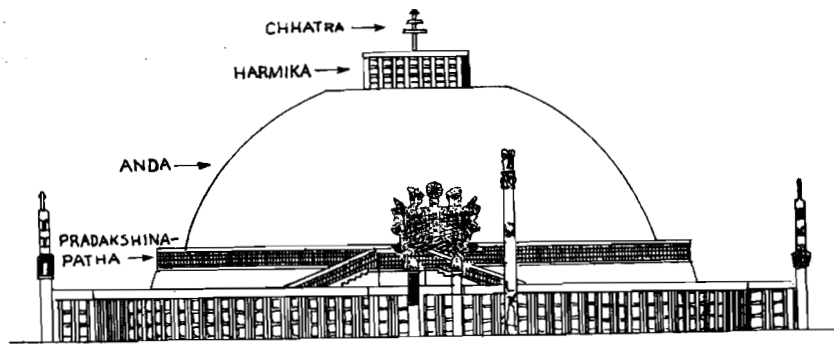
Excavations at Taxila and nearby places have exposed a number of **Stupas** :

- Sir John Marshall excavated the Chira-Tope **Stupa** at Taxila. The casing of the drum in this **Stupa** was of stone — ornamentally decorated with images of **Bodhistvas**.
- In 1908 excavations revealed the existence of a **Stupa** at Shah-ji-ki dheri near Peshawar. This **Stupa** was erected by Kanishka and is referred to in the accounts of Fa-hien. The sculptures and other objects of art are products of Gandhara style (we shall discuss this art form separately in this unit).
- A **Stupa** built in the Scythia-Parthian style was found at Jhandial. Nearby was found a small silver casket enclosing one of gold, with a relic bone inside.

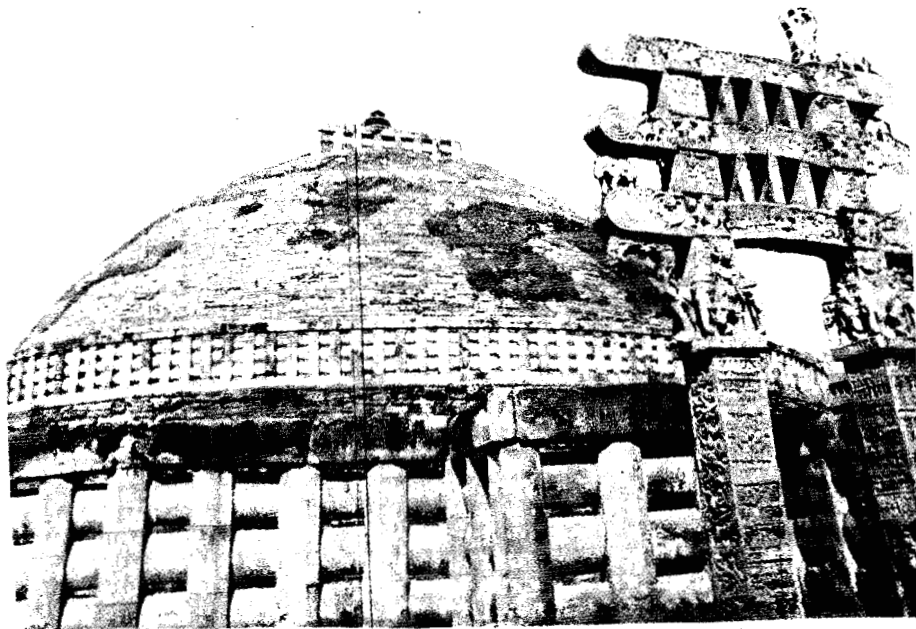
Similarly, a number of **Stupas** have been found in many parts of the country. For example, two **Stupas** were found in Mathura. In fact, this was a period when **Stupa** architecture developed into particular styles and the presence of similar features in **Stupas** of various regions suggests the mobility of and interaction between artisans who built the **Stupas** and beautiful works of art associated with the **Stupas**.



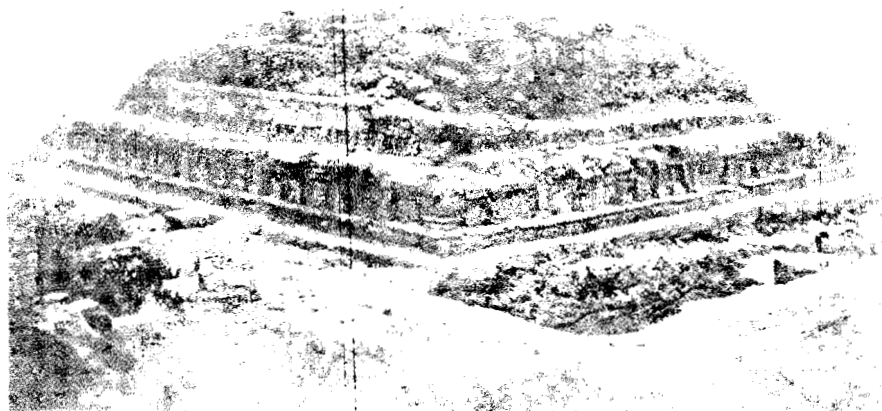
3. Structural Plan of Stupa (Sanchi)



4. Parts of Stupa Sanchi



5. View of Great Stupa (Sanchi)



6. Chir-tope Stupa (Taxila)



7. A Sculptural Stupa Panel from Nagarjunakonda

26.3.4 Rock-Cut Architecture

Both the Buddhists and the Jainas built **Chaityas** and **Viharas** as places of worship.

A **chaitya** is a shrine cell with a votive Stupa place in the centre.

Viharas were primarily cut out of rocks for the residence of monks.

Most of the major **Chaityas** and **Viharas** of this period were built in western and eastern regions. For example in western India, they are located at Bhaja, Karle, Kondane, Nasik, Chitaldo, Ajanta and Kanheri, etc. Similarly, in eastern India we have them in Udayagiri (Orissa). The general features of the **Chaityas** are :

- They have a long rectangular hall ending in a semi-circle at the rear end.
- This long hall is internally divided into a nave, an apse and two side aisles.
- The aisles are separated from the nave by two rows of pillars.

India : Century 200 B.C.
To 300 A.D.

- The pillars come round the votive **Stupa** placed in the centre of the apsidal part of the nave.
- The hall has a barrel-vaulted ceiling.
- The doorway is usually placed facing the votive **Stupa**.
- The facade has a horse-shoe shaped window called the **chaitya** window.

Another aspect of cave architecture is the excavation of **Viharas** or monasteries by both Buddhists and Jains for the use of monks.

In the earlier examples of the western Indian caves the plan is irregular. In the latter ones a regular plan was adopted. The following are the general features of the **Viharas** :

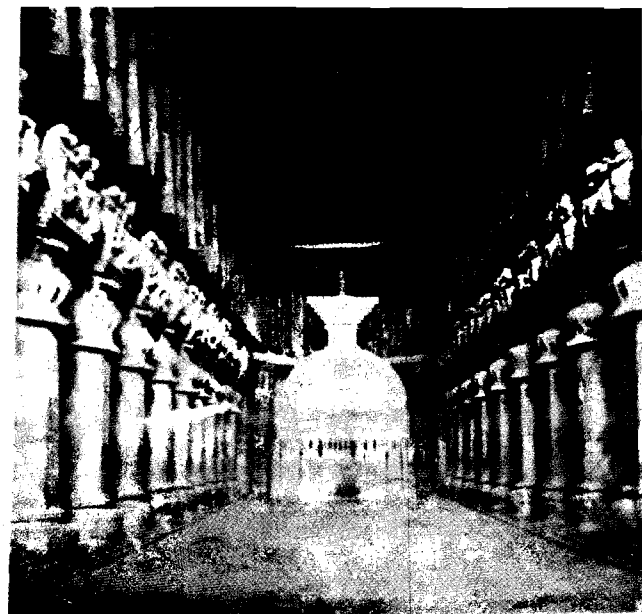
- They have a square or oblong hall in the centre.
- The hall is preceded in front by a pillared veranda.
- A number of small square cells are provided.
- The cells and halls are usually provided with raised benches for the use of monks.

The earliest of the **Viharas** of western India are those at such sites as Bhaja, Bedsa, Ajanta, Pitalkora, Nasik and Karle.

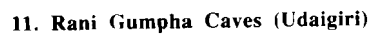
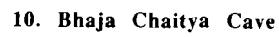
Among the Jaina **Viharas**, those at Udayagiri and Khandagiri (Orissa) were excavated during the time of Kharavela. There are about 35 excavations laid out in two groups. Some of them are provided with one cell and the others are multicelled ones with an open courtyard in the front. The inner facade consists of doorways surmounted by semi-circular arches above. The double storied Ranigumpha cave on Udayagiri hills is the largest of all the caves.



8. Karle Chaitya (Frontview)



9. Karle Chaitya (Cave)



3) Fill in the blanks .

- i) Most of the art forms were(inspired/discouraged) by Buddhism and Jainism.
- ii) The Mauryan art represents.....(immature/mature) art forms.
- iii) The Nagarjunakonda **Stupa** is(different/similar) in style with those of North India.
- iv) The Taxila excavations were initially carried out by(Mortimer Wheeler/Sir John Marshall).
- v) **Viharas** were used as places of(worship/residence) by monks.

26.4 SCULPTURAL ART

Sculptural art cannot be separated from architecture because sculptures form part of a total complex like a **Stupa** or a **Chaitya**. When single images were fashioned they too were generally housed in **Viharas** or were located at religious centres. In this period, we notice the development of regional or local styles or schools in creations of sculptural art. Gandhara and the Mathura schools developed in the north while in the south, Amaravati was the major early centre in the lower Krishna–Godavari valley.

In general, the art of the post–Mauryan period was distinct in character from earlier Imperial Mauryan Art. The Mauryan art has been described as palace art, whereas the art of the Sunga–Kanva period had a much wider social base. It is also different in motive, technique and significance.

The art of this period is mostly represented in the Buddhist images and relief sculptures carved on the railings, gateways and plinths of the **Stupas** and also on the facades and walls of the **Viharas** and **Chaityas**. Brahmanical sculptures for this period are very few. However, an important development of this period is modelling of the image of the Buddha both in the Mathura and Gandhara schools. Following the Buddhists and Jainas, the Brahmanical religion also conceived of images of different gods and goddesses.

In addition to sculptures made in relief on panels, many sculptures were also made in the round. These figures are large in size and well–modelled. However, they do not conform to accurate anatomical proportions; they were not intended to do so. The **Yakshas** and **Yakshinis** occupy the most important place in this group.

Icon or image worship among the Jainas may be traced to the Sunga period. The damaged torso of a nude figure from Lohanipur (Patna) is identified with a **Tirthankara**. According to the Hathigumpha inscription, the existence of image worship among the Jainas of eastern India goes back to the pre–Mauryan times. Some of the Jaina images found in the votive tablets of the Jainas with **ashtamangalas** (eight auspicious marks) from Mathura suggest that image worship among the Jainas too was becoming common by the first century A.D.

Among the Buddhists it was the **Mahayana** sect that propagated image worship. Seated and standing images of Buddha were carved in Mathura and Gandhara.

The bas reliefs of Sanchi, Barhut and Bodh Gaya represent an early phase in the art of relief–carving. Most of these sculptures are found on the medallions or rectangular panels on the railings that surround a **Stupa**. The relief sculptures represent themes from Buddha's life and scenes from **Jataka** stories, and the events are depicted in a continuous narration.

26.4.1 Gandhara School

Gandhara is located in the north–western part of the Indian sub–continent on both banks of river Indus. It included the valley of Peshawar, Svata, Buner and Bajjora. It was ruled by the Achaneminds of Iran in the sixth–fifth centuries B.C. Later it was occupied by the Greeks, Mauryas, Sakas, Pahlavas and Kusanas. As a result, this place produced a mixed culture. Its art, which was mainly Buddhist, was profoundly influenced by Hellenistic art. For example the depiction of transparent garment draped in Graeco – Roman fashion and vary curly hair in Buddha idols, (see illustrations). But at the same time we must remember that the chief patrons of Gandhara art were the Sakas and the Kusanas.

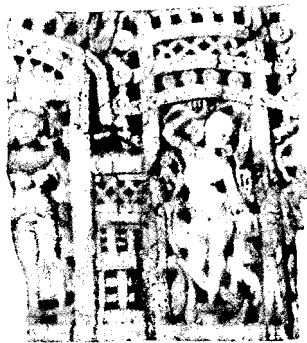
The main centres from where the art pieces of Gandhara School have been found are Jalalabad, Hadda, Bamaran, Begram and Taxila. Gandhara art can be divided into two schools—early and later. During the early school, which existed during first and second century A.D., blue-grey schist stone was used to make idols. However, in the later school instead of schist stone, mud, lime, pilaster and stucco was used to make the idols. These idols give a realistic representation of the human figure clearly indicating limbs and other organs of the body. They are depicted with sharp features and anatomical accuracy.

Besides idols we find beautiful carvings on reliefs and bas-reliefs the theme being the life of Buddha and **Bodhisattvas**. For example :

- The drum of the Chira Stupa, at Taxila, is decorated by images of **Bodhisattvas** placed in niches for worship.
- On the ramparts of small pillars, of the Sehribhelol **Stupa**, the images of Buddha, **Bodhisattvas** and incidents from their life have been carved out.
- A bronze reliquary was recovered from the side walls of the **Stupa** at Shah-ji-kidheri. It depicts Buddha, Kusana kings and flying geese (symbolic of wandering monks).

The Gandhara art had many other aspects also. For example a gold reliquary has been found at Bimaran in which a series of figures are contained within an arcade. Similarly ivory plaques have been found from Begram.

We give here some illustrations (See Nos. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17) which reflect various aspects related to Gandhara art.



12. Decorative Ivory Panel



14. Buddha in Meditation



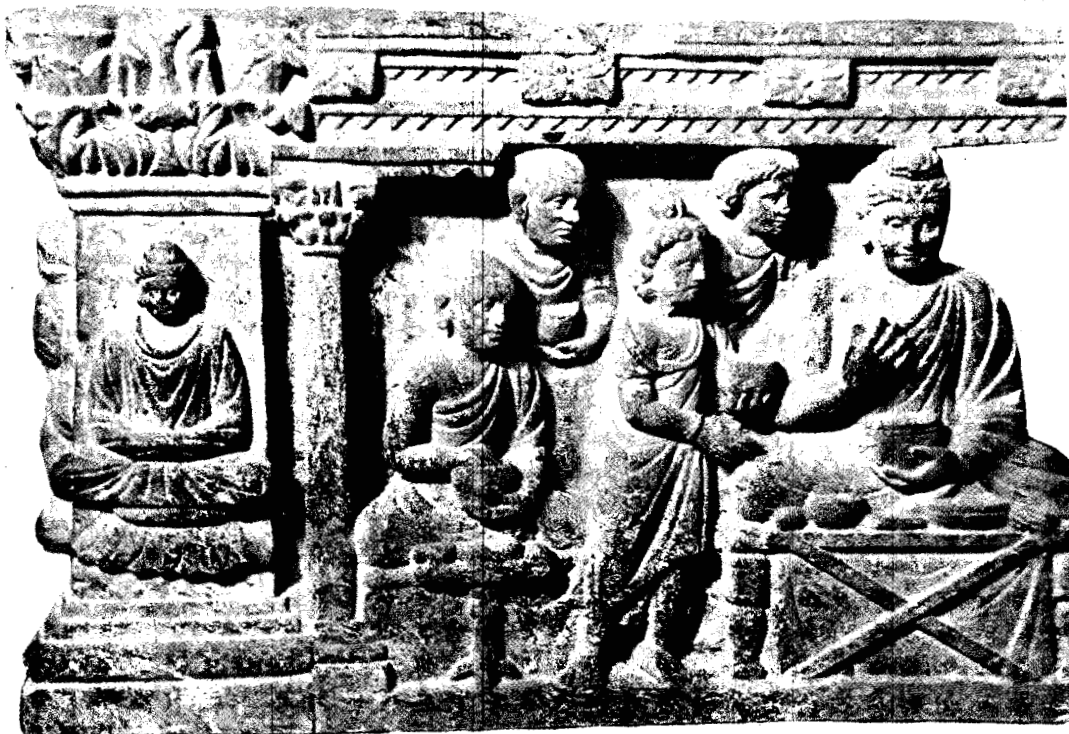
13. Standing Buddha



15. Bodhisattva Sculpture in Schist



16. Head of Buddha (Stucco)



17. Bar relief : Buddha eating in company of Monks

26.4.2 Mathura Art

The origin of Mathura art form is traced back to the second century B.C. By the first century A.D it had not only become a major centre of art but the art pieces of this school were in demand in far off areas. In a time span of nearly four hundred years this school produced a variety of sculptures and other pieces of art for the followers of Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanical faiths. A significant dimension of Mathura art is that it also produced, like Afghanistan in the Kushana period, images of kings and other notables. This shows that Mathura artists were aware of various forms of art activities of the period and were catering to the requirements of different social groups of Indian and non-Indian origin. At the same time what they were creating, from local red stone, were uniquely of Mathura. Another aspect worth noting about this school is that it depicted various patterns of life on the votive pillars. For example, we have scenes from forests where men and women are collecting flowers; women playing with cranes or offering fruits to birds and women playing in gardens and water tanks. The votive pillars from 'Kankali Tila' demonstrate how feminine beauty has been utilised by the sculptor. The themes handled by the Mathura artists are in fact many, and, as in Sanchi and Bharhut, the artist chose elements from nature to enrich his creation.

The sculptures here were carved out of red sandstone which was available locally. Let us briefly take a thematic study of the sculpture belonging to the Mathura school.

1) **The Buddha idols:** The earliest images of **Bodhisattvas** and Buddha were perhaps made at Mathura and sent also to other regions. For example, the Sarnath image of standing **Bodhisattvas** installed in the period of Kanishka-I was made at Mathura. We get Buddha images mainly in two postures — standing and sitting. Among the sitting idols the one found at Katra is among the oldest. The characteristics of this idol are:

- Buddha sitting under a Bodhi tree,
- Right hand in **abhaya** posture,
- **Dharmachakra** and **tri-ratna** chiselled in palms and at bottom of the feet, and
- The head is shaven except one lock.

In fact, some of the general characteristics of the Buddha idols of this age are:

- i) They are made of white spotted red stone.
- ii) Images started getting fashioned in the round so that they could be seen from every side.
- iii) The head and face are shaven.
- iv) The right hand is shown raised in **abhaya** posture.
- v) There is no mark on the forehead.
- vi) The dress is always tight on the body and the left hand holds the frill.

2) **Jaina specimens :** Mathura was a sacred centre of the Jains as it was of the followers of Brahmanical and Buddhist faiths. It has yielded a number of inscriptions which refer to lay followers of Jainism, to Jaina monks and nuns and to donations and dedications made by them. For example, as early as the middle of the second century B.C., an inscription (**pasada-torana**) by a Jaina **Sravaka** named Uttaradasaka. Kankali Tila was the main Jaina site at Mathura and it has yielded an overwhelmingly large number of :

- Sculptures
- **ayaqapatas** or stone slabs with Jaina figures in centre and auspicious marks or with representations of Jaina **Stupas** (these were objects of worship)
- various architectural fragments like pillars, capitals, crossbars, railing - posts, etc.

The representations of the Jainas or the **Tirthankaras** on the **ayaqapatas** date before the Kushana period but regular images become common only from the Kushana period onward. Of them Parsvanatha is recognizable from his canopy of snake hoods and Rishabhanatha from rocks of hair falling on his shoulders but other **Tirthankara** images are not so easily identified.

3) **Brahmanical Images:** Quite a few Brahmanical images have been found in Mathura. The earliest representations are of Siva, Lakshmi, Surya and Sankarshana or Balarama. During the Kushana period Karttikeya, Vishnu, Sarasvati, Kubera and certain other gods, including Naga images, were represented in sculpture. Some of iconographical features or features which characterize each deity are present in images of this period.

- For example Siva, though he is represented in the **linga** form, began to be carved in the form of **Chaturmukha linga**. This refers to **linga** with four human faces of the Siva on all four sides.
- The Surya in the Kushana age is shown riding a chariot driven by two horses. He wears a heavy coat, a dress in the lower half of the body resembling a **salwar**, boots, a sword in one hand and a lotus in the other.
- Balarama has a heavy turban on his head.
- Saraswati is seated with a rosary and manuscript in her hands. Dressed in a simple way she wears no ornaments and is attended by two other figures.
- Durga in her Mahisha-mardini form, is depicted as the killer of buffalo demon.

A number of **Yaksha** and **Yakshini** images have been discovered in Mathura. They are associated with all the three religions — Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanism. Kubera was another deity shown with a bulging belly. He is associated with wine and with parties where participants indulge in drinks. He bears resemblance to Bachhus and Dionysius respecting the Roman and Greek gods of wine.

4) **The images of rulers:** The Mat village in Mathura yielded big images of Kushana Kings and other notables like Kanishka, Wima and Chastana. The idea of building reliquaries or structures for housing portrait-statues of rulers and other dignitaries of the State possibly came from Central Asia. This was done to give the rulers a divine status. The dresses which the dignitaries wear were also of Central Asian origin.

Many heads of Scythian dignitaries have also been found at Mat. These discoveries indicate that Mathura was the most important centre of the eastern part of the Kushana empire. They also forcefully suggest interaction between Gandhara and Mathura art forms.

In due course Mathura art forms contributed significantly to the development of Gupta art forms.



18. Woman doing her hair



19. Head of a Tirthankara



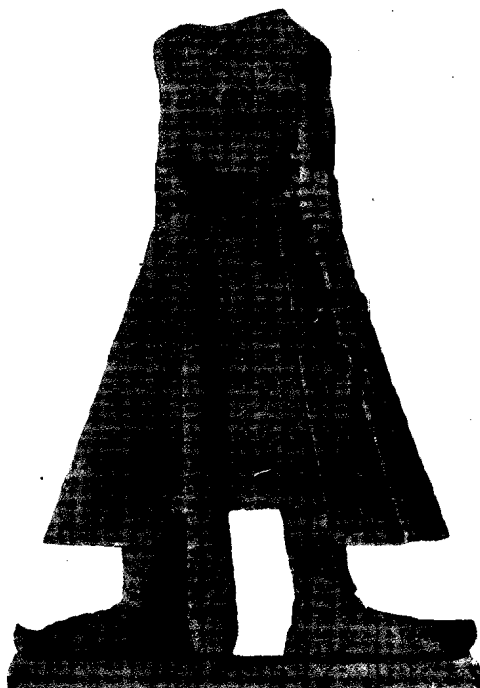
20. Sculptural depiction of a Jataka story



21. Surya



22. Kubera with his disciples



23. Statue of Kaniska



24. Chaturmukha Suralinga

26.4.3 Amaravati Art

In the eastern Deccan, in the lower valleys of the Krishna and the Godavari developed the Amaravati school of art during this period. This was patronised by Satavahana rulers and later by Ikshvaku rulers, by other political dignitaries and families, by officials, merchants, etc. Inspired by Buddhist themes the main centres of this art were Nagarjunakonda, Amaravati, Goli, Ghantasala, Jaggayyapeta etc. The most productive and prosperous phase of this art has been dated to 150 B.C.-350 A.D. The sculptural forms again come to us from the railings, plinths and other parts of several **Stupas**. The reliefs represent the traditional narrative art taking themes from the Buddha's life and from **Jataka** stories. For example, on a relief medallion at Amaravati is depicted the story of the taming of an elephant by the Buddha and the commotion preceding it. The whole depiction of the story has been done by the sculptor in a natural way:

- an infuriated elephant approaching the Buddha on a street,
- men and women are frightened; men throw up their hands and women cling to men,
- Buddha moves towards the elephant in a spirit of adoration and humility,
- the elephant kneels down in submission, and
- the entire episode is being watched by women and men from balcony and windows.

The entire story has been depicted in relief on a medallion by the sculptor.

The general features of Amaravati art are:

- the figures are carved out of white marble,
- they are well modelled with long legs and slender frames,
- physical beauty and sensual expressions command this art,
- though nature is depicted, the central characters are human beings, and
- kings, princes and palaces figure prominently in sculptural representations.

Amaravati art shows distinct evolution toward maturity of style in a period of five hundred years. For example, the earliest examples which we get from Jaggayyapeta date back to 150 B.C. In these, the figures are isolated units and are not interrelated in one composition. However, "one can see here the beginning of that tall and slender human frame which is so characteristic an ethnic form in the narrative reliefs of the Krishna valley, and later, of Pallava sculpture". In later narrative reliefs the figures are well-shaped and interrelated.

In thematic treatment there is a striking similarity in certain cases with Mathura. For example, a relief panel at Amaravati which shows a group of six bathing women with water pots is very close to such depictions of Mathura. The way we have the representations of Kushana kings from Mathura in the form of statues, we find the kings and princes as themes represented in Amaravati sculpture also. However, at Amaravati, they are not individual statues but are arts of a narrative. For example:

- the story of King Udayana and his queen is depicted on a relief,
- a relief medallion depicts a court scene where the king is receiving presents, and
- in a relief panel is depicted a scene showing a king on march, with elephants, horse-riders and footmen.

In fact, the Amaravati school, under its Satavahana patrons and master craftsmen, produced some of the finest art pieces in ancient India.



25. A group of Women enjoying their bath



26. Depiction of the Story of king
Udayana and his Queens



27. Taming of an Elephant by Buddha

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss in about ten lines the main characteristics of Gandhara art.

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- 2) Give such examples of art which demonstrate that besides religious themes, political personalities had drawn the sculptor's attention. Answer in about ten lines.

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- 3) Fill in the blanks.

- i) The relief sculptures represent themes from
(Mahabharata/Jataka stories/Ramayana).
- ii) The principal patrons of Gandhara art were
(Mauryas/Satavahanas/Sakas and Kushanas).
- iii) The foremost examples of nature being represented in sculpture come from
(Amaravati/Taxila/Mathura).
- iv) Idols related with Brahmanical religion have been found in
(Sarnath/Mathura/Nagarjunakonda).

- 4) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×).

- i) The Tirthankara images from Mathura have a well built body.
- ii) Kubera idol represents sun worship.
- iii) The Gandhara sculpture represents Greek themes in Indian style.
- iv) Amaravati school of art flourished in Eastern India.

26.5 LET US SUM UP

We have seen that during this period both architecture and sculpture reached a high level of maturity and artists produced requisite pieces of art. Unfortunately, we do not have any information about these master craftsmen. What we have is their art but not their names. However, we do get the names of donors in certain cases. They show that the artisans were no more dependent on royal patronage only because many merchants, devotees and other categories of people also patronised them.

There was gradual development of art forms and thematic representation. For example, the earlier creative expressions like rock paintings, terracotta figurines, etc. developed into mature sculptural forms. Stone sculptures, both in relief and in the round, were being produced in large numbers in this period. The symbolic representations ultimately gave way to images and the images of the Buddha are the best examples of this change.

We have also seen in this unit that certain regions developed their own unique art forms. This development is illustrated by the schools of Gandhara, Mathura and Amaravati. Though most of the themes in these art forms are religious, we do find nature and man being in a close relationship by the sculptor. The art specimens certainly give us a glimpse into the social and economic life of the period. The bas relief of Mathura which depicts monks, donors and attendants is an example in this regard. Indian activities during this period were also influenced by art forms. Vigorous interaction with various non-Indian and the presence of Hellenistic and central Asian elements in India art of this period shows how enriched Indian culture became through contact with other contemporary cultures.

26.6 KEY WORDS

Aisle : The prayer path of a **Stupa**.

Architrave : Projected portion from the **Stupa** which is known as **Banderi** in Hindi.

Apse : Half-circular.

Hellenistic Influence : The influence of art forms in the Indian tradition by that of Rome and Greece art styles.

Ivory : Images or figures made from the bones, primarily of elephant.

Moats : Deep wide ditch filled with water to act as a defence.

Nave : A place where monks assembled for prayer.

Schist : A type or quality of stone formed through layers.

Stucco : A type of plaster used for making surface even.

Vaulted : In a cylindrical shape of 'dholak'.

26.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sec. 26.1
- 2) See Sub-sec. 26.3.3
- 3) i) Inspired
ii) Mature
iii) Different

iv) Sir John Marshall

v) Residence

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) On the basis of Sub-sec. 26.4.1, write your answer.
- 2) Mention about the idols of kings which have been found in excavations at Mathura and sculptural representations at Amaravati. See Sub-secs. 26.4.2 and 26.4.3.
- 3)
 - i) **Jataka** Stories
 - ii) Sakas and Kusanas
 - iii) Mathura
 - iv) Mathura
- 4)

i) ✓	ii) ×	iii) ×	iv) ×
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SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

Romila Thaper, *A History of India Vol. I.*

J.C. Harle, *Art and Architecture of India*, Penguin Books.

K.A. Nilkanta Sastri (ed), *A Comprehensive History of India Vol. 2.*

Himanshu Prabha Ray, *Monastery and Guild*, Oxford.

UNIT 27 EARLY STATE FORMATION IN THE DECCAN

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Sources
- 27.3 About State Formation
- 27.4 Antecedents
- 27.5 Geographical Background
- 27.6 Outline History of Satavahana Dynasty
- 27.7 Settlement Pattern
 - 27.7.1 West Coast
 - 27.7.2 Inland Settlements
- 27.8 Administration
- 27.9 Society
- 27.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.11 Key Words
- 27.12 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

27.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to learn about:

- the Satavahana dynasty which founded the earliest state in the Deccan,
- the nature of administration under the Satavahanas, and
- the changes in the society at this time.

27.1 INTRODUCTION

In Block 6 you learnt about the expansion of trade in north India in the post-Mauryan period. This was associated with an increase in the number of cities and with developments in art and architecture. In this Unit we shall study the changes in the Deccan. The major power that rose in the Deccan around the first century B.C. was the Satavahana dynasty. Here we shall concentrate on the political and social structure of the Deccan under the Satavahanas.

27.2 SOURCES

The names of the Satavahana rulers, also known as the Andhras, occur in the lists of kings found in the **Puranas**. There are many difficulties in using these lists as sources of history without critically comparing them with other sources. For example the names of the kings and the duration of their rule vary in the different **Puranas**. Moreover, information about the kings is interwoven with myths and legends, and one has to carefully distinguish between facts and legendary stories. The **Puranas** are nevertheless useful when studied with other sources such as coins and inscriptions. The Satavahanas minted a large number of coins in lead, silver and an alloy of copper. Their silver coins carry the portrait of the king and his name. The inscriptions are found in Buddhist caves cut in the rock and record donations made by Satavahana kings and queens as well as by a large number of ordinary people. By comparing the information available in these different sources, scholars generally accept that the Satavahanas began their rule around the first century B.C. Their earliest record is found engraved on rock in a cave near Nasik in the present state of Maharashtra.

27.3 ABOUT STATE FORMATION

We should now pose the question: What is a state and how does the emergence of state bring about changes in society? There are many theories which seek to explain the reasons for the emergence of a state. Reasons for the emergence of a state vary from region to region. In certain cases the development of trade and the growth of urban centres could lead to the rise of a state. Other theories suggest that population pressure or conquest could also result in a change in the political structure.

Scholars generally agree that a state is a more efficient method of controlling expanding populations. A state exercises control over a more or less well-defined territory and maintains an administrative machinery to collect taxes and revenue. It pays for a regular army that enforces law and order. But together with all this, the inequality and stratification in society also increases. There is a well-marked distinction between the rulers and the ruled. The rulers control the resources of society for their own benefit and use. The ruled, on the other hand, provide the revenue and the money required to maintain the members of the ruling family, the notables in the state, the various categories of officials and the army. Thus the basic difference between a tribal society and a state society is in the nature of political control. In a state system, a specialised administrative machinery separates the rulers from the ruled. In a tribal society, political power is generally exercised by a clan which has no authority to enforce its decisions. The position of the clan depends on the loyalty of the members and most decisions are taken together.

27.4 ANTECEDENTS

In Block 3 you learnt about the spread of Chalcolithic settlements in the western Deccan in the second millennium B.C. The eastern Deccan was occupied a little later in the second half of the first millennium B.C. by iron using communities. These were by and large village settlements, the abode of a large number of tribes. Early Sanskrit literature, particularly the Epics and the **Puranas**, mention several tribes such as the Andhras, Sabaras, Pulindas, etc., who lived in the Deccan. Many of these are also mentioned by Asoka in his inscriptions. But most of these references are of a general nature and it is difficult to define the region where they lived in the Deccan.

The process of change perhaps started with Mauryan expansion in the Deccan. The Mauryas were primarily interested in exploiting the mineral resources of the Deccan peninsula. The gold, diamonds and gems from the mines in Karnataka and Andhra were transported to Magadha in the north through a series of land and coastal routes. Market centres developed at important points along these routes such as Dharanikota on the banks of the Krishna in the Guntur district of Andhra and Karad in Satara district of Maharashtra. Many chiefs known as **maharathis** became important in several scattered pockets. But it was under the Satavahanas who were related by marriage to the **maharathis** that the first state emerged in the Deccan.

27.5 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

The Deccan peninsula is divided into the plateau region and the coastal plains by the hill ranges of the Eastern and Western Ghats. The Andhra coast is much wider than the Konkan coast to the west. The general slope of the plateau is to the east and as a result the major rivers such as the Mahanadi, Godavari and Krishna flow eastwards into the Bay of Bengal. The deltas and valleys of the rivers provide fertile areas for settlements. Perhaps a significant aspect of the geography of the Deccan is the fact that the hill ranges of the plateau can be crossed only along the passes.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The **Puranas** are a useful source for studying the Satavahanas because:
 - i) in them we find information about kings interwoven with myths and legends ()
 - ii) in them we have enough myths and legends to tell us about the Satavahana period ()

- iii) their information can be compared and verified by other sources such as coins and inscriptions ()
 - iv) the Puranas are the truth
- (2) It may be said that:
- i) a tribal society has the same political structure as the societies with a developed State formation ()
 - ii) in a developed state formation there is a well marked distinction between the ruler and the ruled ()
 - iii) in a tribal society political decisions are taken by the entire tribe together ()
 - iv) both (ii) and (iii) ()
- 3) The process of change towards the formation of State and Deccan emerged perhaps with:
- i) invasion of Huns
 - ii) invasion of the Mughals
 - iii) invasion of Greeks
 - iv) Mauryan expansion in Deccan for gold etc. which were transported through a series of routes, in turn leading to use of market centres and local chiefs.

27.6 OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE SATAVAHANA DYNASTY

According to **Purana** tradition it was Simuka Satavahana who established Satavahana power. Kanha or Krishna, his brother, is perhaps known to us from an inscription at Nasik. Another record that lists several rulers of the dynasty is the Nanaghat inscription of Queen Nayanika, the widowed queen of Satakarni, who performed Vedic sacrifices. Nanaghat was a major pass connecting Junnar with the coast, and in a cave at the head of the pass portraits of the Satavahana rulers were carved. Unfortunately, the sculptures are now completely destroyed and all that remains are labels over their heads giving their names.

We know very little about the rulers that followed Satakarni till we come to the reign of Gautamiputra Satakarni. An inscription of his mother engraved on the entrance to a cave at Nasik, provides us details about the extent of his kingdom and the events of his reign. A major achievement of Gautamiputra Satakarni was the defeat of the Kshatrapas of western Deccan and Gujarat. His mother's epigraph praises him as the restorer of Satavahana glory and further proof of this comes from numismatic evidence. After his victory, Gautamiputra counterstruck silver coins of the Kshatrapa Nahapana with his own legend and symbols. According to the **Periplus of the Erythraean Sea**, as a result of the rivalry between the Kshatrapas and the Satavahanas, Greek ships entering Kalyan, a port near present Bombay, were sent under guard to the port of Bharuch. Perhaps control of the lucrative foreign trade was one of the causes for the conflict. It would also seem that under Gautamiputra Satakarni, Satavahana rule extended over Andhra as well.

Gautamiputra was succeeded by his son Pulumavi and it was at this time that the Satavahanas consolidated their power in the eastern Deccan. For the first time we find Satavahana inscriptions outside the western Deccan at Amaravati. Yajnasri Satakarni was the last important Satavahana ruler and after him the kingdom was splintered and divided between his successors — one line of kings ruling in the Andhra region. It was also under the later Satavahanas that coins with bilingual legends were issued and in addition to the name of the king in Prakrit these carried a legend in a south Indian language — opinion being divided on its identification between Tamil and Telugu.

In addition to the Kshatrapas, an early Satavahana (ruler) had to contend with the power of Kharavela from Orissa or Kalinga. Kharavela rose to power in Kalinga in the middle of the first century B.C. He despatched an army to the west without caring for Satakarni; this suggests that early Satavahana power suffered setbacks both at the hands of the Kshatrapas and of Kharavela. It was revived only through the exploits of Gautamiputra Satakarni.

One of the problems of Satavahana history is that we know very little about the relationship between the ruling dynasty and the small chiefdoms that flourished in

different pockets of the Deccan. For example, the inscriptions refer to marriage relations of the Satavahanas with the **Maharathis** and the **Mahabhojas** — in fact in the Nanaghat labels inscriptions a Maharathi finds precedence over a **Kumara** or prince, and Queen Nayanika herself was the daughter of a **Maharathi**. **Maharathis** are also known to have made independent donations — most of their inscriptions having been found around Karle, while the records of the **Mahabhojas** occur along the west coast.

27.7 SETTLEMENT PATTERN

On the basis of the find-spots of their earliest inscriptions, it can be said that the Satavahanas began their rule in the western Deccan. A second century A.D. inscription of Gautamiputra Satakarni's mother from Nasik provides information about the extent of the kingdom under the Satavahanas. The mention of both the Western and the Eastern Ghats as forming parts of Gautamiputra Satakarni's empire suggests that by this time Satavahana rule covered the entire Deccan and that it was divided into **aharas** or districts. We get the names of at least five **aharas** in the inscriptions:

Govardhana-ahara with its centre around Nasik; **Soparaka-ahara** on the west coast; **Mamala-ahara** comprising the hilly portions of the Pune and Satara districts; **Satavahanihara** covering the Bellary district of Karnataka; and **Kapurachara** perhaps in Gujarat.

27.7.1 West Coast

On the west coast there were a series of ports at Bharuch, Kalyan, Sopara and Chaul and continuing further south all along the Konkan coast. To these ports commodities were brought from the inland centres through passes along the Western Ghats. An important text for understanding the nature of travel and trade is the first century A.D. **Periplus of the Erythraean Sea** written by an anonymous Greek sailor. It provides a graphic account of the dangerous passage through the narrow mouth of the Gulf of Cambay to Bharuch. As a result incoming ships were piloted into the port by royal fishermen of the district. We have earlier referred to the conflict between the Satavahanas and the Kshatrapas over control of the maritime trade and the competition between the ports of Bharuch and Kalyan.

27.7.2 Inland Settlements

Across the Western Ghats on the inland side, the major concentrations of settlements were around Nasik; Junnar; within a 30 Km. radius of Karle; and further south in the upper Krishna basin around Kolhapur. It should be emphasised that all these areas are agriculturally rich and fertile and provided a valuable resource base for the ports on the west coast. These ports handled much of the trade in the first century A.D. between India and the Mediterranean region and were also linked by the overland transpeninsular route across the Deccan to centres in Andhra and along the east coast. It went from Bharuch to Paithan and Ter and further east to centres in Andhra. The ancient site of Paithan spreads over 4 sq. km. along the Godavari and from time to time a rich yield of antiquities like coins, moulds, terracottas and pottery have been carried out in the area so far and hence we know very little about the structural remains of the Satavahana period.

Ter lies in the major cotton producing region of the Deccan. Excavations at the site have yielded evidence of wooden fortifications and a number of vats, perhaps for dyeing cloth. Ter is also well known for the find of an ivory figurine very similar to the specimen found at Pompeii, but perhaps the most important ruin at the site is that of a brick **caitya** subsequently converted into a Brahmanical temple.

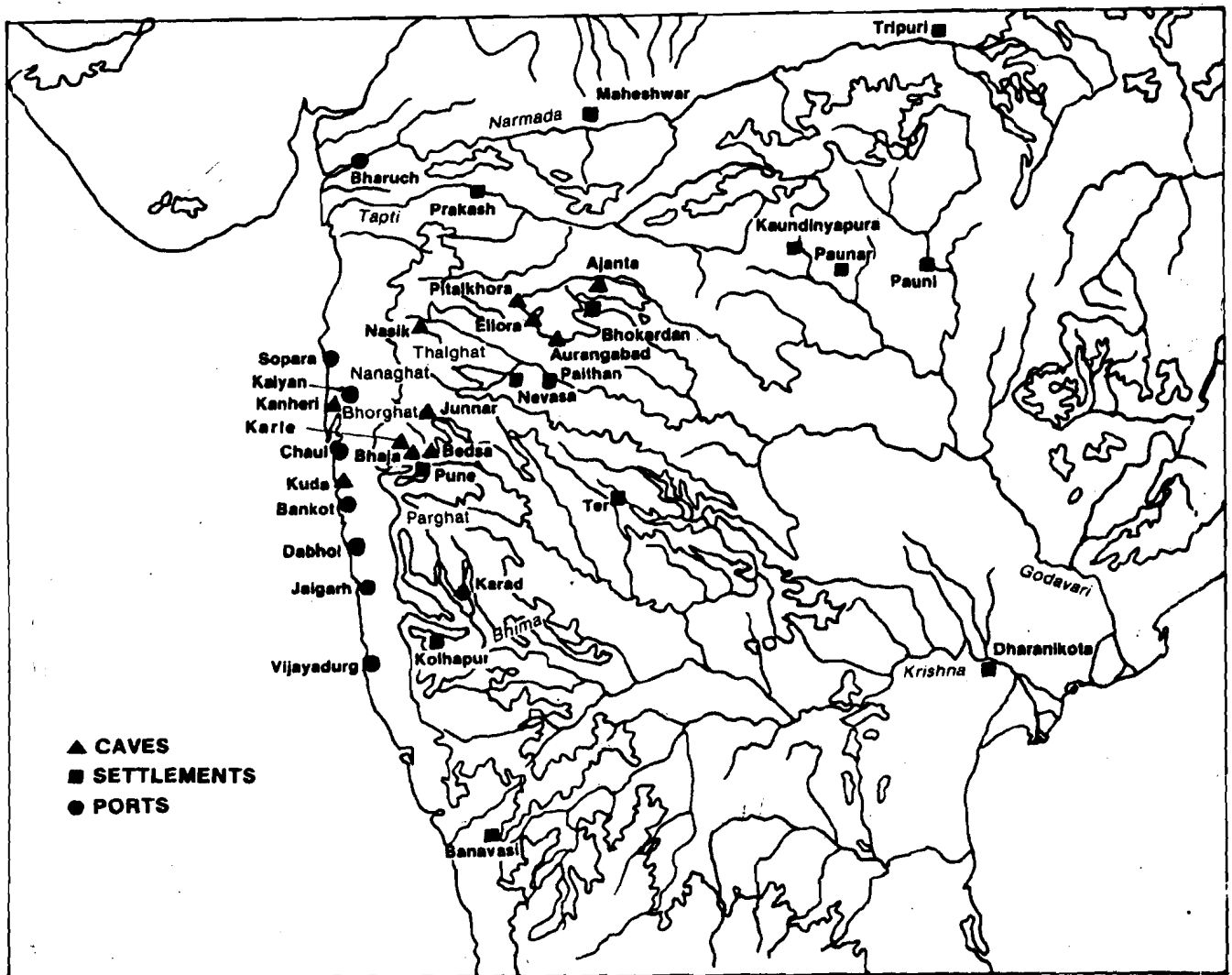
Another route in the Deccan linked Ujjain to Maheshwar on the Narmada and past the caves at Ajanta and Pitalkhora to Bhokardan and Paithan. Bhokardan was a major bead-making centre and was also known for shell and ivory-working. Inhabitants of Bhokardan or Bhogavardhana are known to have made donations at the Buddhist caves of Bharhut and Sanchi in central India.

Further south in the upper Krishna valley Karad is an early centre referred to in Buddhist inscriptions. Also located in the same region is Kolhapur. In the western part of the town a rich hoard of bronze objects was found. Some of these like the statuette of Poseidon were clearly imports, while others like carts and bronze vessels were of local

manufacture. An extensive site in the adjacent district of Belgaum is the site of Vadgaon Madhavpur, a suburb of Belgaum town where excavations have yielded large numbers of coins and other antiquities. Further south is the site of Banavasi known as the find-spot of one of the Satavahana inscription. It was perhaps a fortified settlement as there are indications of a fortification wall and a moat.

The trans-peninsular route across the Deccan linked these sites in the western Deccan to centres like Amaravati in the lower Krishna valley and went past the Karimnagar region of Andhra. The Karimnagar region has an extensive distribution of early historical sites, an important centre being that of Kondapur about 70 Km. north-west of Hyderabad. Excavations at the site have yielded a rich collection of coins and terracottas and several structures of brick of various sizes laid in mud mortar. Peddabankur is a small village now but was an important settlement during the Satavahana period extending over a 30 hectare area. About 10 km. from Peddabankur was the fortified site of Shulikatta. It was surrounded by a mud-rampart and excavations have unearthed a large brick structure at the site. Another major habitation site was at Kotalingala which was settled in the pre-Satavahana period as indicated by recent coinfinds. The Satavahana settlement had a mud fortification and extensive brick structures. Large quantities of iron slag and ore were found at the site. Leading from the Karimnagar region, the route branched off into the lower Krishna valley which has a large concentration of Early Historical sites. Prominent among these

MAP - 1: SATAVAHANA SETTLEMENTS



are Amaravati and Dharanikota on both banks of the river Krishna, and Dharanikota was connected to the river through a navigation channel. The earliest structural activity at the site was marked by the construction of a wooden wharf which was later converted

into a brick structure. But with the gradual silting up of the navigation channel the site was abandoned in the fourth century A.D. In addition to the transpeninsular route, another alternative was to go to the region of Vidarbha into central India — the important settlements in Vidarbha being those of Panuar, Pauni, Mandhal, Bhatkuli and Adam.

One point that needs to be stressed is that it is only during the Satavahana period that fortified settlements develop in the Deccan, and excavations indicate a marked improvement in the quality of construction. Brick was increasingly used both for fortification as well as for other structures. The floors were well of the made by means of rammed clay and the roof supported by wooden posts and covered with tiles.

The railway lines at present follow the same routes that were used in the ancient period. The Bhorphat is still the only pass across the Western Ghats connecting Pune to Bombay past a series of early Buddhist caves such as Shelarwadi, Bedsa, Bhaja, Karle, Ambivale and Kondane.

27.8 ADMINISTRATION

Administration under the Satavahanas was much simpler than under the Mauryas. Inscriptions refer to ministers who were in charge of various functions. Among other things, they served as treasury officers and maintained land records. The exact number of ministers is not known. These ministers were appointed directly by the king and the post of a minister does not seem to have been hereditary, i.e. passed from father to son. They were perhaps paid in money from the revenue collected by the state. We do not have exact figures for the amount of revenue collected, but we do know that the state collected taxes both from agriculture and trade. One of the practices started by Satavahana rulers in the first century A.D. was that of donating revenue of a village to either a Brahmana or the Buddhist Sangha. This practice became much more widespread under the Gupta rulers.

The importance of land-revenue for the king can be judged from the elaborate procedure that was used to record donations of land. These donations were first proclaimed in an assembly or *nigama-sabha*. It was then written down either on a copper-plate or cloth by an officer or minister. This record was then delivered to the donee to whom the grant had been made. There was a keeper of records who maintained a detailed account of these donations.

The rulers at this time were eager to bring more land under cultivation so that they could earn extra revenue. It seems that anyone who cleared the forest and tilled a plot could claim ownership of the land. The revenue from trade was another major source of income. We shall discuss the expansion of trade in a later unit. Here we should point out that much of the trade was handled by guilds who also acted as bankers. The state took elaborate measures to encourage trade. Highways were made secure and rest-houses were constructed along them.

27.9 SOCIETY

The social structure of the Deccan under the Satavahanas shows many features which are different from those prescribed in the Sanskrit texts such as the *Manusmṛiti*. For example, many inscriptions of the Satavahana rulers mention the names of their mothers rather than those of their fathers, such as Gautamiputra Satakarni or Satakarni, son of Gautami. This is not in keeping with the *Dharmasastras* which state that in the approved forms of marriage the bride acquires the *gotra* of her husband and loses that of the father.

Another interesting feature of the inscriptions is that the Satavahanas refer to themselves as unique Brahmanas who crushed the pride of the Kshatriyas. According to the Brahmanical texts it was only the Kshatriyas who had the right to rule. The inscriptions are also useful as they record donations by a cross-section of the population and from this we can judge the prosperity of certain sections of the society. Traders and merchants figure prominently as donors, but also important are blacksmiths, gardeners and fishermen. No doubt these artisans and craftsmen benefitted from the increased long-distance trade. What is noteworthy is that they mention their occupations with

their names and not their castes. In an earlier unit we had mentioned that Buddhist texts prescribe a somewhat different division of society as compared to the Brahmanical texts. Here the distinction was based on work and craft and in most cases people were known by their occupations rather than their castes.

Another category of donors that is known at this time was that of **yavanas** or foreigners. The term **yavana** originally denoted an Ionian Greek, but around the Christian era it was used indiscriminately for any foreigner. Many of the **yavanas** adopted Prakrit names and made donations to Buddhist monasteries. Women frequently made gifts either on their own or sometimes with their husbands or sons. One of the Satavahana queens named Nayanika also performed Vedic sacrifices and made large donations to the Brahmana and Buddhist monks.

These examples indicate that society in the Deccan, as it is known from the records of the period, were not governed by rules laid down by the Brahmanical texts. Thus any reconstruction of the ancient social structure should carefully analyse textual references and establish their veracity by comparing these with other sources such as inscriptional or archaeological.

The role of the Buddhist monasteries mentioned in the records of the period had also changed a great deal since the time of the Buddha. In the beginning Buddhist monks were allowed very few personal possessions. These were limited to a few robes and a begging bowl. Gradually the influence and membership of the Buddhist Sangha increased. We have seen that Satavahana kings donated large sums of money and land to the Buddhist monasteries. This added to the wealth of the Sangha. It is also at this time that we get references to donations made by Buddhist monks and nuns themselves.

27.10 LET US SUM UP

The Satavahana period was important in the history of the Deccan because it was in the first century B.C. that the earliest state came into being in peninsular India. The administration of the state was simpler than that of the Mauryas. A crucial factor was the expansion of overland and maritime trade networks. This provided additional revenues to the rulers and also resulted in the prosperity of a large number of towns and cities throughout the Deccan in this period.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Can you name the scholars of society who donated land during this period?

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- 2) Write a short note on the Inland trade routes of this period.

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UNIT 28 EARLY STATE FORMATION IN SOUTH INDIA (TAMILAHAM)

Structure

- 28.0 Objectives
- 28.1 Introduction
- 28.2 The Region
- 28.3 The Five Eco-zones and Subsistence Pattern
- 28.4 Evolution of Political Society
 - 28.4.1 Different Kinds of Chiefdoms
 - 28.4.2 Plunder and Booty Redistribution
 - 28.4.3 Muvendar and Other Levels of Political Control
- 28.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 28.6 Key Words
- 28.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

28.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to understand:

- what eco-zones constituted Tamilaham or south India of the early period
- how the various forms of subsistence co-existed and interacted
- how the different kinds of chiefdoms functioned, and
- how they represented different levels of political control,

28.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 27 you learn about early state formation in the Deccan under the Satavahanas. A similar situation is not seen in Tamilaham during the period. We do not see the existence of a state power in the region, but only chiefdoms. State presupposes the existence of a centralised political authority over a territory. Its authority would be based on the control of the territorial resources. It would have a regular system of taxation and organised defence. Facilitating both taxation and defence, the state would have a bureaucracy or a team of officials of different ranks and functions. On the other hand, a chiefdom would have no such evolved features. A chiefdom would be a society of hereditary status, ruled by a chief. His authority would be the one based on the control of his people bound by the concerned tribal or clanish ties of kinship. The chief would be the embodiment of the kinship relations of his people. There would be no regular taxation or periodic exaction of any revenue from the people, but only occasional voluntary payments to the chief. In this unit you will be made familiar with the variety of chiefly powers and their levels of political development.

28.2 THE REGION

The land in between the hills of Venkatam and Kanyakumari is called Tamilaham. It includes the whole of modern Tamil Nadu and Kerala. With forested hills, undulated terrains, pastures, arid zones, wet-lands and long sea coast, the region represented a combination of diverse eco-zones. The three principal chiefdoms, the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas had their strongholds both in the interior as well as on the sea coast. The Cheras had Karur in the interior and Muciris, the well known ancient port, on the west coast. The Cholas had Uraijur in the interior and Puhar on the coromandel coast as their strongholds. Similarly, the Pandyas had Madurai and Korkar as their interior headquarters and port respectively. These were the most important political centres of the period in the region.

28.3 THE FIVE ECO-ZONES AND SUBSISTENCE PATTERN

The ecological differences of the region are reflected in ancient Tamil poetry. This is in the form of the concept of **aintinai** or five eco-zones. In ancient Tamil poetry Tamilaham is portrayed as a combination of five **tinai**s, viz., **kurinji** (hilly backwoods), **palai** (arid zone), **mullai** (pastoral tracts), **marutam** (wet-land) and **neital** (sea coast). There could be areas in which one **tinai** or the other dominates. But generally most of the **tinai**s are fragmented and mixed up all over the region. The mode of human adaptation varied from **tinai** to **tinai** depending on its ecological conditions. The social groups also varied. The people of **Kurinji** took to hunting and gathering. **Palai** being dry land, the inhabitants over there could not produce anything. They took cattle lifting and plundering. The people of **mullai** practised animal husbandry and shifting cultivation. In the **marutam**, the people could pursue plough agriculture and in the **neital**, fishing and salt making. Thus Tamilaham had different forms of subsistence as determined by the ecological conditions of the five **tinai**s. People from each **tinai** went out interacting with the peoples of the other **tinai**s and entered into barter of goods. For example, the people from the hilly backwoods came down to other zones for exchanging their resources like honey, meat, fruits and other wild goods. The people of pastoral tracts exchanged their dairy products and the coasted people fish and salt. Agrarian zones attracted all of them. The small, self-sustaining **tinai**s grew up into larger eco-zones through such interaction and interdependence. There were larger zones of productivity as well as non-productivity. The zones of better productivity had a relatively developed social division of labour. In the zones of lesser productivity the society was essentially simple and consisted of clans. By and large the peoples of Tamilaham represented a complex society of unevenly developed components which shared a common culture. The political level of the society varied from the simple chiefdom of clans to complex chiefdom of ruling houses. A full fledged state power was yet to take shape.

28.4 EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL SOCIETY

The earliest recognisable phase of the evolution of political society can be seen in the chiefdoms of clans. There were several chiefdoms of clans, some big and others very small. The chiefs of clan-chiefdoms were addressed to in the poems as the great son (**perumakan**) or chiefly son (**Ko-makan**) indicating the relation between chiefs and their clan members. What is really indicated is the basis of kinship. Some such chiefdoms must have grown beyond kinship through the conquests and subjugation of other clans. The relatively larger chiefdoms of complex nature were born out of conquests and subjugation. Marriage alliances of chiefs also were responsible for the formation of larger chiefdoms, but the real basis of the enlargement of chiefdoms was their wealth. Chiefdoms with large agricultural areas constituted the most powerful ones. There were three such most powerful chiefdoms in contemporary Tamilaham, viz; the Chera, Chola and Pandya. These chiefdoms represented the phase of the evolution of a political society anticipating the emergence of a real state.

28.4.1 Different Kinds of Chiefdoms

There were three different kinds of chiefdoms in Tamilaham. They were of the **kizar** (little chiefs), **velir** (bigger chiefs) and **vedar** (the biggest chiefs) categories of chiefs. The **Kizar** were headmen of small villages (**Ur**), generally bound by kinship. Many **Kizar** are mentioned in the poems. They are referred to by being prefixed with the name of their respective villages. **Arnkantur-kizar** or **UrnturKizar** may be cited as examples. Some of them were subjugated by the bigger chiefs and had to serve them in their campaigns. Poems refer to **Kizar** doing **vidutozil** (obligatory services) to bigger chiefs like Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas in their campaigns. The bigger chiefs in their turn rewarded the **kizar** through gifts which included grant of predatory control over the subjugated villages. Such **kizar** sometimes received control over certain other villages also as reward for serving bigger chiefs. The **velir** were mostly hill chieftains, though there were **velir** controlling low-lands too. The hill chiefs were hunter chiefs, **vetar-koman** or **kuravar-koman** or **nedu vettuvan**. **Vetar**, **kuravar** and **vettuvan** were the major clansmen of the hills dominated by the **velir**. **Venkatamalai**, (the hills of

Venkatam), Nanjilmalai (the high ranges south of Travancore), parampurulai (probably modern parampikkulam reserve forest near pollachchi), potyilmalai (high ranges in the modern Madurai district) are some of the important centres of the hill chiefs of the period. The Chera, Chola and Pandya were the three principal ruling houses of the biggest category of chiefs. They were known as Muvendar, the three cendar. These chiefly houses had control over peoples of larger areas. The Cheras controlled the peoples of the Kurinji dominated areas of the western ghats toward sea. The Cholas had control over the peoples in the Kaveri area and the Pandyas, in the south-central area toward seas. They had several lesser chiefs under their service and paying tributes (tiarai). There was no notion of a precisely demarcated territory. The political authority functioned through control over peoples rather than privileges over basic resources. For example, the control over the peoples like Kuravar, or vetar or vettuvai by their chiefs made them chiefs. The hills as well as plains were collectively owned by such peoples. The right of their chiefs emanated from their kinship with the people. The resources were inherited not by individuals but by groups whose members were bound by ties of common ancestry. These were descent groups and they made voluntary payments to their chiefs. Regular and periodic payment of taxes was not in vogue. However, the productivity of the chiefdom determined the strength of the chiefs. Compared to the chiefs of agricultural areas, the pastoral and hunter chiefs were less powerful. Powerful chiefs tried to subjugate lesser ones and extracted tributes from them. Plunder raid was the characteristic feature of contemporary political practice.

28.4.2 Plunder and Booty Redistribution

All chiefs, big and small, had to resort to plunder raids for satisfying the needs of their people. The chiefs redistributed the booty among their warriors, bards and medicants besides their own kinsmen. The institution of gift-giving (Kodai) was integral to the practice of booty redistribution. Gift-giving was considered to be the most important responsibility of any chief. Most of the poems in Puranaruru (one of the anthologies under Ettuttokai) praise the generosity of chieftains. Generosity and bravery are the two major virtues of chieftains according to such poems. The insufficiency of local resources made chiefly plunders an economic imperative. A poem in Puranaruru, praising a chief namely Urtur-kizar, shows how meagre his resources were. When a dependent approached him for gifts, he called his blacksmith to get him a new lance, so that he could go for a raid and acquire booty to give gifts. Plunder raids and booty redistribution thus became the characteristic feature of contemporary polity. Chiefs of all kinds indulged in plundering against one another. Lesser chiefs joined hands with the big ones in plunder campaigns and obtained their shares of booty. Cattle and grain constituted the routine items of booty. The bards of the period sing about the gifts of elephants, horses, golden lotuses, chariots, gems and muslin. Sometimes the raids of bigger chiefs involved subjugation of villages beyond their control. In such cases the lesser chiefs assisting the bigger ones got the subjugated villages. It was not the land of the village that was granted but the control over the people there.

28.4.3 Muvendar and Other levels of Political Control

The antiquity of the Muvendar as the principal ruling groups goes back to the Mauryan period. Asokan Edicts mention them. The bards praise the Muvendar as 'crowned kings' and mention that the whole of Tamizakam belonged to them. The title of crowned kings need not necessarily indicate the establishment of state power. A state presupposes the existence of standing militia, regular taxation, bureaucracy and local administrative bodies. These had not evolved as yet. Nonetheless, the authority of the Muvendar was significantly different from that of the other categories of chiefs. Their subjugation of lesser chiefs was an ongoing process. The main concern of all the three ruling groups—Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas—was subordination of velir chiefs who were next in importance. The velir also had great antiquity. Along with Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas, Satyaputras or the Adigaiman chiefs are also mentioned in the Asokan Edicts. Satyaputras were of the status of the velir chiefs. They held sway over the communities in the high ranges of upper Kaveri area. The other prominent velir chiefdoms lay on the highlands and sea coast along the fringes of the areas of Muvendar. The modern districts of Dharmapuri, Nilgiris, Madurai North Arcot, Tiruchirappalli, Padukkottai are the chief places of the hills and plains occupied by the velir chiefs. There were about fifteen important velir chiefdoms in all as scattered in Tamilaham. Some of them had control over communities in strategic centres like points of exchange, ports, junctions of highways and hill stations. Certain places and resources determined

the nature of their power. With the coming of the period of Indo-Roman trade and control over strategic centres and trade goods added to the importance of the chiefs. Pari of Parambumalai (near Pollachchi), Ariyar of Podiyilmalai (Madurai), Andiran of Nanjilmalai (south of Travancore), Irunko-vel of Kodunbai (Pudukkottai) were some of the prominent velir chiefs mentioned in the poems. Velir Chiefs controlling such strategic centres had to face severe challenges from the superior chiefs like Muvendar. Sometimes such competitions led to the annihilation of the weak. The destruction of the domain of Pari, the velir chief of Parambunadu by Muvendar is a well known example. Apart from direct combats, the bigger chiefs tried to gain access to the velir domains through marriage relations also. There were several instances of the Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas taking their brides from velir families. In the case of the village chiefs of strategic areas the bigger chiefs adopted the method of military control. They were subjugated and made subservient to the bigger chiefs. Muvendar had several such subjugated chiefs as their subordinates serving them in plunder raids.

It is obvious that the Muvendar was most powerful political authority in contemporary Tamizakam. Next to them was the political authority of velir. The village chiefs of Kizar constituted the primary level of political authority. Although this gives the impression of a political hierarchy, there was no determinate chain of political control uniting these three levels of political authority. Integration of the lesser chiefs was in progress under the subjugative and marital policies of Muvendar. But a unified political system was still in the making. The traditional authority over resident communities based on kinship remained fundamental to contemporary political control. Traditional assembly of elders transacted the day to day affairs in every settlement. The assembly site was called manram, a raised seating around the foot of a tree. It was also called podiyil. The chief was assisted by a council of elders called avai (Sabha), the structure, composition and functions of which are not known. Two other bodies often discussed as part of early Tamil polity are aimperumkuzu or the five great groups and enperayam or the eight great groups. These were relatively later bodies probably developed after third century A.D. The structure and functions of these bodies also are not known.

Check Your Progress

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (X)
 - i) The chiefdoms of Tamizakam were based on payment of regular taxes.
 - ii) The political authority of the period was based on the control of people rather than resources.
 - iii) Muvendar were fullfledged state systems.
 - iv) Gift giving was a chief's primary social responsibility.
- 2) How did different categories of chiefdoms co-exist and interact? Write in ten lines.

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28.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you learnt about the various eco-zones, their subsistence pattern and the various details of the chiefdom level political formation. You also learnt how the system of plunder raids and booty redistribution functioned as the crucial factor in the political practice of the time. Another important point you learnt is the basis of clan ties and kinship in the political authority. You could also learn about the gradual process of institution formation during the period after the third century A.D.

28.6 KEY WORDS

Eco-zones: A small area with its own ecological characteristics such as climate, soil conditions, organisms etc.

Tinai: A region with its special ecological factors, social groups and subsistence pattern.

Chieftdom: A society of hereditary status controlled by a chief who collected voluntary tributes from his people.

Muvendar: The three principal ruling groups, namely Chera, Chola and Pandya.

Velir: The chiefly groups next to the principal ones.

Kizar: The smallest category of chiefs who had virtually the control over their descent groups.

Manram or Podiyil: A raised seating around the foot of a tree.

28.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

- 1) (i) × (ii) ✓ (iii) × (iv) ✓
- 2) See sub-sec. 28.4.3

UNIT 29 AGRARIAN SETTLEMENTS AND AGRARIAN SOCIETY IN PENINSULAR INDIA

(THE DECCAN AND THE SOUTH)

Structure

- 29.0 Objectives
- 29.1 Introduction
- 29.2 Forms of Subsistence
- 29.3 Spread of Agrarian Settlements
 - 29.3.1 Agricultural Production in the Settlements in Tamilaham
 - 29.3.2 Settlements in the Deccan
- 29.4 Ownership Rights
- 29.5 Revenue and Surplus Extraction
 - 29.5.1 Revenue from Agriculture
 - 29.5.2 Modes of Acquiring and Distributing resources in Tamilaham
 - 29.5.3 Excesses in Extraction
- 29.6 Social Organisation
 - 29.6.1 Society in Tamilaham
 - 29.6.2 Society in the Deccan
- 29.7 New Elements and Social Change
- 29.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 29.9 Key Words
- 29.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

29.0 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this unit is to discuss the spread of agrarian settlements in the Deccan and South India from 200 B.C. to 300 A.D. After reading this unit you should be able to know about:

- different forms of subsistence which were prevalent in different parts of South India,
- the nature of the spread of agrarian settlements,
- the nature of ownership of land,
- revenue income from agriculture, and redistribution of resources in the agrarian settlements,
- the organisation of agrarian society, and
- the introduction of new elements and the beginnings of change.

29.1 INTRODUCTION

The earliest evidence of cultivation in peninsular India is traced back to the later phase of the new stone age which is dated in the first half of the second millennium B.C. The new stone age people cultivated millets like **ragi** and **bajra** and also pulses like green gram and horse gram. Making terraces on slopes of hills was an important feature of the settlement of the new stone age and the cultivation was limited to the terrace fields. Rice was found in peninsular India roughly around the beginning of the first millennium B.C. which is the starting point of the iron age in the south. The spread of rice cultivation took place in the Deccan and south India during the iron age.

The earliest of the iron age settlements are seen in the upland areas. The introduction of iron did not bring any sudden change in the techniques of cultivation. Technological advancement came later with the introduction of the iron ploughshare. This coincided with a concentration of settlements in the river valleys. Harnessing of bullocks to the plough and the extensive use of iron ploughshare resulted in the expansion of area under cultivation and an unprecedented increase in agricultural production. There was a corresponding increase in the population too. A remarkable change occurred later in the agrarian sector with the beginning of the practice of donating village land to religious beneficiaries such as Buddhist monasteries and Brahmans. They had better knowledge of seasons and ability to predict weather. The grants of land to the monks

and Brahmins resulted in the coming in of non-cultivating groups in the agrarian sector. Thus we identify three phases is the spread of agrarian settlements in south India.

- The first phase of primitive agriculture with a low level technology in which cultivation was confined to the hill slopes.
- A second phase, characterised by plough agriculture with considerable advancement in technology and spread of cultivation to the river valleys.
- A third phase which witnessed the introduction of a non-cultivating groups into the agrarian sector. These groups were endowed with better knowledge of seasons, managerial capacity and aids for method of cultivation.

29.2 FORMS OF SUBSISTENCE

Forms of subsistence were determined by several factors such as geographical location, nature of terrain, material culture and the level of technology of the given region. Primitive techniques lingered on for long in some pockets while some other areas advanced in material production and social development. Diverse forms of subsistence are more visible in the region of Tamilaham. You will read in Unit 31 that early Tamil Sangam poems speak of five eco-zones in terms of **tinai** and the subsistence pattern of each eco-zone was quite distinct. There were:

- **Kurinji**, the hills and forests,
- **mullai**, the pasture land with low hills and thin forests,
- **marutam**, the fertile agricultural plains
- **neytal**, the sea-coasts and
- **palai**, the arid zone. The **mullai** or the **kurinji** tracts could become an arid zone in scorching summer.

The **Kurinji** tracts had forest tribes who were variously known as **kuravar**, **vetar** etc. Their main occupations were hunting and collecting forest produce like bamboo, rice, honey and roots. They practised "slash and burn" cultivation on the hill slopes and produced millets and pulses. They used various tools such as spades, sickles and iron-tipped hoes. Such hill tracts were places where pepper and other spices were grown in plenty. There are literary references to the cultivation of pepper and facilities for watering the gardens.

The pasture of the **mullai** were occupied by cowherds who were known as **itayas**. Their source of livelihood was cattle rearing. They exchanged dairy products. They too practised shifted cultivation and produced millets and pulses and lentils. The **marutam** or the agrarian areas were mostly in the fertile river valleys which were suitable for the wet land cultivation of paddy and sugarcane. The people, who were called **uzhavar**, meaning ploughmen, engaged themselves in plough agriculture and produced considerable surplus of paddy.

People of other **tinai**s depended on the **marutam** tracts for rice, the staple food.

The **neytal** people, who were **paratavas**, were engaged in fishing and salt producing. They exchanged fish and salt for earning their livelihood.

The **palai** zone was a seasonal phenomenon of the summer. During summer, cultivation was not possible due to scarcity of water. Therefore there were some people in the region who took to wayside robbery and cattle lifting. Salt merchants and dealers in other articles often passed through the **palai** regions in caravans. Such caravans were often plundered by people who belonged to the **marava** groups.

From the above discussion, the following forms of livelihood can be listed.

- hunting and gathering forest produce
- cattle rearing
- plough agriculture
- fishing and salt making
- wayside robbery.

Chart I: Physiographic Divisions, Inhabitants and Occupations

Region	Geographical feature	Inhabitants	Occupation
Kurinji	hill and forests	hunters and gathers (Kuravar, Veter)	hunting, food gathering slash and burn cultivation.
Mullai	pasture land with low hills and thin forests	shepherds (Ayar and Itayar)	Cattle rearing, shifting cultivation
Marutam	River valleys and planes	cultivators (uzhavar and vellaler)	Plough agriculture
Neytal	Sea-Coasts	Fishermen (Paratavar)	Fishing, pearl diving Salt making
Palai	Arid zone (transformation of the hill tracts of pasture land in the summer)	Robbers Eyinar, Maravar)	Wayside robbery and hunting.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Mark the right (✓) or wrong (×) statements:

- Diverse forms of subsistence are more visible in the region of Tamilaham. ()
- The five Tinalis were the Deccan, Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. ()
- The palai zone is a seasonal phenomenon. ()
- The third phase of agriculture in south India is characterised by introduction of non-cultivating groups into agrarian sector. ()

2) Write five lines about the eco-zones of ancient Tamilaham.

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3) Write three lines about the form of subsistence in the mullai or pasture lands.

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29.3 SPREAD OF AGRARIAN SETTLEMENTS

An increase in population is a notable change from the new stone age to the iron age in the Deccan and South India. This increase is reflected in the number of the iron age sites. As a result of this change there was a spread of settlements from the upland areas to the fertile river valleys and a transformation from partly cattle rearing and partly shifting cultivation to settled agricultural economy. The main features of this way of life were:

- a concentration of settlements in the river valleys,
- a certain level of craft specialisation,
- extensive use of iron tools and implements,
- new technology of the iron ploughshare,
- management of minor irrigational facilities and
- a change from the dry land crops to a more surplus yielding wet land crop of paddy.

Archaeological sites which suggest these changes are scattered all over South India. They are generally known as megalithic sites. You have already studied about megaliths in Block 3. Before discussing agrarian settlements we would mention in brief about megaliths.

Magalith literally means big stone. The megaliths are associated not with the actual settlements of the people but with the burial sites in the form of stone circles around the graves. Some habitation sites such as Tirukkampuliyar, Alagarai etc. also have been brought to light but they are very rare. The beginnings of the megaliths are traced to about 1000 B.C. but in many cases they are dated in the fifth to the first century B.C. In some places they continued even later. The grave goods consisted of a variety of articles like human bones, various types of pottery including the characteristic Black and Red ware, inscribed pot sherds, tools and weapons of iron, beads and ornaments, cult objects, and several other things. It is from these megalithic remains that we know about the material culture of the agrarian settlements of the iron age in South India. Further, they corroborate some evidence supplied by the contemporary Tamil poems.

29.3.1 Agricultural Production in the Settlements in Tamilaham

Agriculture in Tamilaham was carried on with the help of the iron ploughshare. Spades, hoes and sickles also were used for different agricultural purposes. Blacksmiths knew the metallurgy of iron, and some sites have yielded furnaces used for iron smelting. Iron slags also have been obtained from such sites. Iron tipped plough is necessary for deep ploughing. For rice and sugarcane land needed deep ploughing. The use of ploughs is attested by literature and inscriptions. A dealer in ploughshare figures as a donor in a cave inscription in Tamilaham. Bullocks and buffaloes were harnessed to the plough, and the employment of the draught animals combined with the use of the plough made agricultural operations efficient.

Irrigation facilities were organized at times by local cultivators and at times by kings and chieftains. River water was channelised to the fields. Remains of an ancient reservoir were discovered near Kaveripattinam in Tamilaham. Irrigation was important because rainfall was not sufficient in the region. Paddy and sugarcane were the two important crops in the fertile marutam fields. Pulses also were grown. It is known from the literature of the period that the people had some knowledge of the seasons, which was necessary for successful cultivation.

Uzhavar and vellalar were the cultivators of the land. Uzhavar literally means ploughmen and vellalar means the masters of soil. One of the sources of the labour for agriculture was the groups of ploughmen. Atiyor and Vinalvalar are also mentioned as working in the fields.

Atiyor probably means slaves and vinalvalar means workers earning 'wages'. Details about the 'wage' rates and other conditions of labour are not known. In several contexts members of big families are found engaged in agricultural production. Production based on family labour alone did not yield large amount of surplus. However, in spite of this limitation, the agrarian settlements could sustain different groups of functionaries like blacksmiths, carpenters, bards, dancers, magicians, priests, monks etc.

29.3.2 Settlements in the Deccan

There was an overall increase in the number of settlements in the Deccan in the river basins, on the coasts and on the plateau during the Satavahana period (1st Century B.C. to the 3rd Century A.D.). The Godavari valley had the largest number of settlements. The material culture of the Satavahana settlements showed some improvements from that of the megalithic settlements of the Deccan. The tools and implements included ploughshares, sickles, spades, axes and arrowheads. The hoe continued in the developed phase but it was properly socketed. Iron ore was available in the areas of Karimnagar and Warnagal. Iron working in these areas is indicated as early as the megalithic period. Gold working also is attested to in the Deccan in the Satavahana period. These developments show that metallurgy had progressed in these areas.

Irrigation facilities were known in the form of tanks and wells. The water wheel was used for lifting water. Digging tanks and wells was considered to be a meritorious act. Some rulers are praised in the inscriptions as the makers of tanks. Rich people also constructed tanks and wells.

The people of the Deccan had the knowledge of paddy transplantation. The river basin of the Godavari and Krishna became an extensive rice producing region in the first two

centuries of the Christian era. Cotton was grown in the black soil areas and the cotton products of Andhra became famous even in foreign countries. The cultivation of coconut trees went a long way in the development of the coastal areas. Plantations of mango tree and some other trees of timber are also heard of in different parts of the Deccan.

The source of labour in the Deccan included waged labourers and slaves. **The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea** states that slaves were brought from Arabia. This clearly shows that there was sharp distinction and stratification in the society. The distinction between the 'high' and the 'low' was prevalent in Tamilaham. The 'high' group consisted of rulers and chieftains and the **vellala** and **velir** sections who were masters of the land. The 'low' section consisted of ordinary peasants, bards and dancers and the workers etc. The distinction was more crystallised in the Deccan where a fusion of indigenous developments and the northern ideals and ideology took place at an earlier stage.

29.4 OWNERSHIP RIGHTS

The social distinction on the basis of wealth and property takes us to the problem of ownership rights. In the far south, we have seen that there were some vellala groups who were masters of the soil. This seems to suggest possession of land rather than work on other's land for wages. Occasionally, the chieftains granted **ur** settlements to their fighters and bards. In effect the person who was given land received the right to collect the income from the **ur** settlements which were granted to him. Generally, the field was owned collectively and the produce were also enjoyed collectively after paying the dues to the chiefs. The nature of land rights is clearer in the Deccan. There were **Gahapati** householders who were both landowners and merchants. According to an inscription Ushavadata son-in-law of Kshatrapa ruler Nahapana of western Deccan, purchased a plot of land from a Brahmin and donated it to a Buddhist **Sangha**. This was possible because of the fact that land could be owned privately. From this deal the private owner received 40,000 **kahapana** coins. The Satavahana kings donated plots of land and even villages to religious beneficiaries. The lay devotees followed this practice only later. From the inscriptions of the period we know that private individuals owned plots of land.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Mark the (✓) or (×) against the following:

- i) Megalithic monuments are the remains of the new stone age. ()
- ii) Millet crops could not be cultivated with hoes. ()
- iii) Irrigational facilities were not known in the river valleys of Tamilaham. ()
- iv) The chieftains donated villages to the temples. ()
- v) Private individuals in the Deccan were not entitled to own land. ()

2) List six features of the agrarian villages in ancient South India.

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3) Write five lines about the tools and implements and irrigational facilities in the agrarian settlements in the Deccan.

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4) Write five lines about the ownership of land in the Deccan.

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29.5 REVENUE AND SURPLUS EXTRACTION

Land revenue was the main source of income. Its collection was done by the state through an organised mechanism. In this section we will discuss land revenue and its collection.

29.5.1 Revenue from Agriculture

The Tamil literature mentions *irai* and *tirai* as the two types of contribution received by the chieftains. The *irai* appears to have been a more regular contribution and the *tirai*, tribute. Unfortunately we do not have much information from the contemporary records about the rate and mode of collection of revenue. The rulers are often advised to be gentle and moderate in the collection of revenue. This seems to suggest that coercion and excesses were practiced by the authorities in collecting shares from the cultivators.

Revenue system was probably more regular in the Deccan under the Satavahanas but again there also the details are not very clear. We hear about some names of taxes like *kara*, *deya*, *meya*, *bhaga*.

The actual significance of these terms or the amount of revenue claimed by the state are not known. The donation of villages to Buddhist *Sanghas* and Brahmins included revenues from donated villages. In such cases some immunities are mentioned. These immunities were:

- i) against entry by the king's soldiers for collecting any sort of fees;
- ii) against royal officers taking possession of articles from the village.

These would show that:

- ordinarily, villagers had to pay some contribution of money or articles to soldiers when they came to the village, or
- the soldiers were authorised to collect the revenue.

It appears that in some Satavahana regions the rural areas were under the *gaumika* who was in charge of a small military unit, when land was granted to Buddhist monasteries or Brahmanas, the state had to guarantee that their rights were not interfered with by the troops operating in rural areas.

29.5.2 Modes of Acquiring and distributing resources in Tamilaham

How did the resources reach the hands of those who required them? In the Deccan under a well organised state system the modes of appropriation were regularised according to rule and custom. You have read in Unit 28 that a regular state system was yet to emerge in the far south; there was therefore no well-regulated system of distribution of resources.

Several modes of distribution of resources were prevalent in the agrarian settlements in Tamilaham. Here we shall take up the important form of redistribution through gift. Gift was perhaps the most common mode of circulation of resources. Each producer gave a part of his product to others for services rendered. Gift of a rich meal or a piece of cloth was a simple form of redistribution. Fighting heroes were provided with feasts both before and after plunder and raid. Poor singers and dancing women who sang and danced in praise of chieftains travelled from court to court eager to get a full meal and something to put on. At times the gift objects included fine imported wine, silk clothes and even gold ornaments in addition to feast. Brahman priests and warrior heroes often

received villages and cattle in gifts by way of remuneration for their services. Gift of villages to Brahmins accounts for the Brahman settlements in ancient Tamilaham. The acts of redistribution through gift were made by three groups of persons with wealth and power, namely, the crowned kings (**Vendar**), the minor chieftains (**velir**) and the well to do agricultural householders (**vellalar**) of the agrarian settlements.

29.5.3 Excesses in Extraction

In order to make distribution of gifts possible, it was necessary that resources were collected in a centre, that is the residence of the chiefs. Distribution of gifts from a centre was an important feature of redistribution. The pooling of resources often led to plunder and pillage of agrarian tracts. Grains and Cattle were looted. What they could not carry was destroyed. Setting fire to the peasant settlements, devastation of the harvesting fields of the enemies and conversion of the rich gardens to waste land were some of the acts of the plunderers. The **marava** fighters of the hill tracts and the pasture lands were used by the chiefs to plunder settlements. The booty of such plunders was redistributed among the **marava** fighters and the Brahman priests by way of presentation and the remuneration for expiatory rituals. The defenceless plight of the peasants and the way they were terrorised and exploited are attested to by a number of songs of the **Sangam** anthologies.

In spite of all such excess committed against the poor peasants, the war was celebrated as a noble heroic act. It was even institutionalised. The cult of war was propagated through the praise of the courage of the warriors whose memorial stones were made cult objects or objects of worship. The **pana** singers sang in praise of the warlike qualities of the chieftain and his fighters. Booty capture was necessary because of the scarcity of resources. At the same time such activities of excesses resulted in the destruction of resources. This was a contradiction which was inherent in the mechanism of redistribution at the level of chieftains.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Mark the right (✓) and wrong (×) from the following:
 - i) **Iral** and **tlral** were the two items of revenue to be paid in cash.
 - ii) **gualmikas** were the rural administrators of the Satavahanas.
 - iii) The bards and dancers travelled from court to court to receive rich presentations of cattle and land.
 - iv) The plunder war was institutionalised in ancient Tamilaham.
- 2) Write five lines about the plunder wars in ancient South India.

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- 3) Write three lines about the excesses in the appropriation of surplus in early Tamilaham.

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29.6 SOCIAL ORGANISATION

In this section we will study the different social groups and customs in Tamilaham and Deccan areas. Let us first discuss Tamilaham.

29.6.1 Society in Tamilaham

Society in ancient Tamilaham was essentially tribal in character with its kinship organisations, totem worship and tribal cults and practices. In all the **tinals** or

eco-zones, tribal customs prevailed, but a change was gradually happening in the predominantly agricultural region. In this region social organization was becoming complex. This was characterised by the gradual breaking up of old kinship ties and the introduction of the Brahmanical **varna** concept. Social stratification or inequality between different social groups appeared and there was broad distinction between 'high' and 'low'. The landed **vellalar** and the **velala** peasants constituted the basic producing groups in the agrarian settlements.

Craft specialization was only rudimentary and subsidiary to agricultural production. We hear of blacksmiths (**Kollan**) and carpenters (**techan**). The extended family was their unit of production. Weaving was another profession.

Religious worship and cult practices of the village folk followed old tribal rituals which necessitated the presence of ritual groups, such as **Velan**, **Venttuva** etc. They looked after the supernatural elements and their management. However, society was not 'priest-dominated'. There was considerable surplus which led to the prosperity of trading groups. They were known after the commodity in which they traded. Thus we hear of **umanan** (salt merchant), **Koglavanikan** (corn merchant), **aruvaivanikan** (textile merchant), **pon vanikan** (gold merchant) etc. Towards the end of our period these traders were accommodated within the **varna** order which had by that time taken roots in the far south. **Tolkappiyam**, the earliest available work on Tamil grammar, portrays the Tamil Society as consisting of our **varna** divisions. According to this text the traders belonged to the **vaisya** group. In the deep south, especially in the Madurai and Tirunelveli regions the Pandya country, these traders are found associated with some heterodox religious groups. They figure in the early inscriptions of this region as donors of cave dwellings to the ascetics of the Jaina or the Buddhist order. The presence of the ascetics of the heterodox sects suggests that they had some followers in the region.

It was quite natural that the chiefly groups established their centres in the agrarian tracts **marutam** for the reason that surplus resources necessary for the sustenance of a non-producing group were available there only. The chieftains of the **marutam** agricultural tracts started claiming descent from Suryavamsa (Solar line) or Chandravamsa (Umar line) as the Kshatriya of north India did.

The chieftains exploited the peasants in the agrarian settlements and extracted the surplus with the help of the **marava** groups of the peripheral regions. They often plundered the villages. In the Sangam poems war and the warlike qualities of the warrior heroes were glorified. The function of the **Pana** singers and the **Virali** dancers was to glorify the heroes and their heroism. Thus we find that the society in the agrarian **Marutam** region of ancient Tamilaham was an amalgamation of old tribal practices and of Brahmanical ideals and ideology.

29.6.2 Society in the Deccan

In the Deccan all the three major religious systems i.e. Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism enjoyed large following.

The Satavahana rulers extended their patronage to Vedic ritualism. For example Naganika, an early queen of the Satavahana family performed several Vedic rituals and made gift mentioned in the Vedic texts. Jainism had some following in the region and some of the famous teachers of the **Digambara** sect flourished in this period. **Kondakundacharya**, the founder of the **Mulasangha** which became popular in the South, lived in the region. Buddhism spread as a popular movement and that religion could enlist participation of a large number of followers, mostly traders and artisans. The **Mahayana** sect of Buddhism enjoyed good popularity. Ruling authorities, rich men and workers donated liberally to the **viharas** and **stupas**. **Acharya Nagarjuna**, the greatest exponent of **Mahayana** faith flourished in the Deccan. Some foreign elements like **Yavanas**, **Saka** and **Pahlavas** embraced either the Brahmanical or the Buddhist religion. Thus the period witnessed the fusion of various cultural elements in society. The rulers of foreign descent used **Prakrit** and later on **Sanskrit**, in their inscriptions and even adopted Indian personal and family names.

The idea of the four-fold division of society was familiar in the Deccan. The practice of calling people according to their profession was popular. **Halaka** (ploughman), **golika** (shepherd), **vardhaki** (carpenter), **kollka** (weaver), **tilapisaka** (oil presser) and **Kamara** (smith) were some such professional labels. Caste rules were much flexible and this might be due to mixing up with foreign elements. Joint family system was the normal

feature of society. Male domination is clearly attested to in social life. Sometimes some women are found accepting the titles of their husbands like Bhojiki, Maharathini, Mahasenapati etc.

29.7 NEW ELEMENTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

In the Deccan some new elements made their first appearance in the agrarian order during the first centuries A.D. The Satavahana and Kshatrapa rulers donated plots of land and even entire villages to religious beneficiaries such as Buddhist monks and Brahmanas. Along with land, certain economic privileges in the form of the right to collect revenue from the village and to enjoy the right over mines were also transferred to the grantees. It appears that the land grants included some fiscal and administrative rights over the peasants. The royal grants freed the village folk from obligatory payments to administrative functionaries and soldiers who visited the village. In the past many grants to individuals had been temporary. But now the trend was to make the grant perpetual.

The privileges and immunities sanctioned by the rulers and the grant of permanent right over land placed the religious beneficiaries in a highly powerful position. These new developments in the agrarian sector brought about serious and far-reaching changes in the land system and economy.

In the first place the religious beneficiaries became powerful authorities of the villages received by them with the new economic and administrative privileges in addition to the spiritual control which they exercised.

Secondly, land grants to monks and priests created a new class of non-cultivating land owners. Buddhist monks and Brahman priests were not cultivators themselves. They had to employ others to work on their land. The actual tillers were thus separated from the land and its produce.

Thirdly, this type of private ownership abolished earlier collective rights over forests, pastures, fisheries, and reservoirs.

Fourthly, the beneficiaries enjoyed the rights not only over land but also over peasants who worked on land. This led to an erosion of the rights of the peasants who became servile.

These developments in the Deccan were to become prominent elsewhere in the subsequent centuries. Finally, the practice of land grant contributed, with several other features, to the creation of a social order which is described by some scholars as "Indian feudalism".

Check Your Progress 4

1) Mark the right (✓) and the wrong (×) in the space provided:

- a) Social complexity started appearing in the pasture lands. ()
- b) According to Tolkappiyam the traders belonged to the Kshatriya groups. ()
- c) In the Madurai and Tirunelveli regions the cave dwellings were donated to the ascetics of the heterodox sects like Jainism and Buddhism. ()
- d) Kondakundacharya was the founder of the Mulasangha of the Digambara sect. ()
- e) The idea of the four-fold division of society was familiar in the Deccan. ()

2) Write three lines about the craftsmen groups in the Tamilaham.

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3) Write seven lines about the Satavahana land grants to the religious groups in the Deccan.

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- 4) Write a paragraph about the results of the land grants to Buddhist monks and Brahman priests.

29.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we discussed several aspects of agrarian settlements and agrarian society in peninsular India. You have learnt from this lesson about:

- the economic activities of the different sub-regions in Tamilaham
- the spread of agrarian settlements
- the problem of ownership of land
- collection and distribution of resources
- main features of social organisation in Tamilaham and Deccan.
- new elements which were introduced in the agrarian order in the early centuries of the Christian era and the changes brought about by these elements.

29.9 KEY WORDS

Anthology: A collection of poems lyrics.

Pana: A singer of ancient Tamilaham who sang in praise of chieftains.

Slash and burn cultivation: A primitive type of agriculture. Trees and bushes on the hill-slopes are cut down and then burnt. Thus the ground is prepared and then the seed is sown.

Shifting cultivation: The mode of agriculture in which the plot of cultivation is shifted periodically. This is to avoid exhaustion of land caused by continuous use of the same plot.

Tinal: A generic term for a physiographic division of land in early Tamilaham.

Totem worship: Worship of the main symbol of a tribe.

29.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) ✓
b) ✗
c) ✓
d) ✓

2) In your answer you should write about Kurinji mullai etc. zones. See Section 29.2

3) You should write about pastures and cattle rearing. Also see Section 29.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) ×
ii) ×
iii) ×
iv) ×
v) ×
- 2) See Section 29.3
- 3) You should write about such tools as ploughshare, sickles spades etc. and tank and well irrigation. See Sub-Section 29.3.2
- 4) You should write about **vellala**, Gahapati etc. and their rights. See Section 29.4

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) i) ×
ii) ✓
iii) ×
iv) ✓
- 2) You should write about the attacks in agrarian tracts. See Sub-section 29.5.3.
- 3) You should write about the excesses committed against peasants. See Sub-section 29.5.3

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) a) ×
b) ×
c) ✓
d) ✓
e) ✓
- 2) See Section 29.6, second para.
- 3) You should write about land and village grants for religious and other purposes. See Section 29.7, first para.
- 4) You should write about the changes brought about in agrarian sector by the grants to religious beneficiaries. See Section 29.7, from the second para.

UNIT 30 EXPANSION OF TRADE AND URBAN CENTRES

Structure

- 30.0 Objectives
- 30.1 Introduction
- 30.2 Types of Trade
 - 30.2.1 Local trade
 - 30.2.2 Long distance overland trade
 - 30.2.3 Long distance overseas trade
- 30.3 Aspects of commercial organisation
- 30.4 Exchange Facilities
- 30.5 Coins as media of Exchange
 - 30.5.1 Local Coins
 - 30.5.2 Punch-marked coins
 - 30.5.3 Roman Coins
- 30.6 Revenue From Trade
- 30.7 Weights and Measures
- 30.8 Urban Centres
- 30.9 The Impact of Trade and Urban Centres on Society
- 30.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 30.11 Key Words
- 30.12 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises.

30.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the Unit is to discuss briefly the different dimensions of the expansion of trade and urban centres in south India from 200 B.C. 300 A.D. This Unit will focus on the kingdom of the Satavahanas and the regions far south under the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas as well as the local Chieftains who were less important. After reading this Unit you will be able to know about:

- the nature of exchange which determined the character of trade at various levels in early peninsular India,
- transport and communication facilities,
- coins as media of exchange in trade;
- the interest of political authorities in trade,
- urban Centres in South India, and
- the impact of trade and urbanization on the society of early peninsular India.

30.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 29 you read about agrarian settlements and agrarian society. In this Unit we shall discuss other such aspects of economy as trade and urbanisation which helped bringing about significant changes in the society of early peninsular India.

In peninsular India, growth of trade and emergence of urban centres were not isolated phenomena but were very much associated with the other important changes which were taking place in the region. They were generated by:

- changes within society in different parts of peninsular India caused by growth of agriculture in the major river valleys. To an extent this was connected with iron technology of peninsular Megalithic culture (see Unit) and with irrigation. In some parts agricultural surplus appears to have been available.
- Mauryan expansion in peninsular India led to greater contact with the north and to movement of traders, merchants and others. This is suggested by the advantages of the southern route (dakshina-patha) highlighted in the *Arthashastra*. There were further contacts along the coasts. Earlier system and network of exchange in peninsular India thus underwent major changes.

- To this was added another factor. From the close of the first century B.C. demand for Indian goods brought merchants and ships from the Roman world in the west in close contact with peninsular India. This provided a major impetus to the growth of trade and of urban centres.
- All these again are associated with the growth of crafts specialization or growth of skill in producing crafts items which were required for members of the society either in local exchange or for long-distance trade. For example, different types of pottery, bead-making, glass-making, weaving of cloth, all required different skills.

It has however to be remembered that all corners of India were not uniformly affected by these changes. There were, and there continued to be areas in which earlier forms of culture persisted. Secondly between the Deccan and the far south, changes were more prominent in different parts of the Deccan. In the beginning, changes were slower and limited territorially in the far south.

Different aspects of the growth of trade and of urban centres can be studied under the following heads;

- Exchange mechanism in local transactions and long-distance trade,
- Organisations of guilds,
- Transportation, Storage and shipping,
- Means of exchange,
- Revenue from trade,
- Urban centres, and
- Economic and social changes brought about by trade and urbanisation.

30.2 TYPES OF TRADE

You have learnt about the various geographical regions and their produces. Each region had something to exchange for items of other regions. At the same time each of these regions lacked some items which were essential for its own society. The agricultural tracts produced food-grains and sugarcane but it had to depend on the coastal areas for salt and fish. The coastal area produced considerable surplus in salt and fish, but rice, the staple food, had to be brought from the areas of paddy cultivation. The hill ranges were rich in timber, spices etc. but they had to depend on agricultural tracts and coastal areas for foodgrains and salt. The result of this kind of interdependence was that exchange relationship had come to exist among the various geographical regions.

Some of the articles available in south India were required by other parts of the sub-continent and even by other countries and civilizations. Contacts were established through land-routes or sea-routes by those distant countries and the necessary articles were procured. Thus we can identify three levels of trade:

- i) Local trade
- ii) Long distance overland trade, and
- iii) Long distance overseas trade.

30.2.1 Local Trade

Barter was the most common mode of transaction in the context of local exchange. Most of the items of barter were for immediate consumption. Salt, fish, paddy, dairy products, roots, venison, honey and toddy were the regular items of barter in the far south.

Salt was exchanged for paddy; paddy was exchanged for milk, curd and ghee; honey was given for taking fish oil and liquor; rice flakes and sugarcane were given for venison and toddy. Very rarely, luxury items like pearls and elephant tusks also appeared as items of barter. They were also bartered for articles of consumption such as rice, fish, toddy etc. Loan was not unknown in the barter system of the Tamil south. A loan of a fixed quantity of an article could be taken to be repaid in the same kind and quantity at a later date. This was called **Kurietirppai**.

Exchange rate were not fixed. Petty bargaining was the only method of fixing the price of articles. Paddy and salt were the only two items for which a set exchange rate was known in the barter system of the far south. Salt was bartered for equal measure of paddy.

In the Deccan under the Satavahana rule, the use of coins was quite common. Even so the continuation of barter need not be ruled out. Craft produces like pots, pan, toys and trinkets were bartered in the rural areas.

In the barter system of the far south the following features can be noted:

- i) Most of the items of exchange were of consumption articles.
- ii) Exchange was not profit-oriented
- iii) As in the case of production, distribution also was subsistence oriented.

30.2.2 Long Distance Overland Trade

Contacts in various spheres between the northern and southern parts of India can be traced back at least to the fourth century B.C. if not earlier. Resources of the regions which lay to the south of the Vindhyan ranges were known to the north. Early Buddhist literature seems to refer to a route which ran from the Ganga valley to the Godavari Valley. This was known as the **Dakshinapatha**. Kautilya, the author of the **Arthashastra**, has written about the advantage of this southern route. According to Kautilya, the southern territories abounded in conch-shells, diamonds, pearls, precious stones and gold. Moreover, this route passed through territories rich in mines and valuable merchandise. He says that this route was frequented by many during those days. The **Dakshinapatha** touched many southern centres including the city of **Pratishthana**, which was to become the capital of the Satavahanas at a later date. Most of the items of this north-south trade were luxury articles such as pearls, precious stones and gold. Good varieties of textiles moved between the north and south also. Perhaps a fine variety of silk came from **Kalinga**. The name of this thin silk was **Kalinga**, evidently named after the place of its origin. This was an important item favoured by the Tamil Chieftains. The bards who sang in praise of the chieftains received 'Kalinga' silk cloth as a valuable present. The fine types of pottery called Northern Black Polished were (NBP) also found its way to the extreme south. Archaeologists have unearthed some NBP sherds in the territory of the early Pandyas.

Besides the above items some herbs and spices also were brought to the south. These included spikenard and malabathrum (a herb for preparing ointment) which were shipped to the west.

The northern traders also brought a large quantity of silver punch-marked coins. The punch-marked coins in large boards have been unearthed from different parts of south India. They bear testimony to the brisk commercial contacts between the north and the south. As the long-distance trade with northern India was mostly in luxury items the benefit of this trade was enjoyed by a small section consisting of the ruling elites and their men.

30.2.3 Long Distance Overseas Trade

Indian items such as spices, precious and semi-precious stones, timber, ivory and many other articles were in great demand in the western countries. The main source of these articles was south India. These articles were shipped to the west from very early times. Considering the bulk of transactions and the resultant profit, direct trade with the Roman world, of which we have evidence from the close of the first century B.C. proved to very significant for the economy and society of peninsular India.

We shall identify two stages in the commercial contact of Rome with peninsular India.

- i) An early stage with the Arabs as middlemen
- ii) A second stage in which direct contact was established with the knowledge of the monsoon winds.

For a long period navigation in the Arabian sea was coastal. It was tedious and expensive. The Arabs had established commercial connections with India, making the Sea as a highway of trade before the beginning of the Christian era. The geographical position of the Arabs was favourable to them in enjoying the monopoly in the East-West trade. They had some knowledge of the wind systems in the Arabian sea and they kept it as a trade secret. Thus the Arabs played the role of middlemen and raised considerable profit out of the trade with peninsular India.

With the 'discovery' of the monsoon winds which is attributed to a navigator named, **Hippalus** direct contact was established by the Romans with India. This marked the beginning of a period of increase in commerce between Rome and peninsular India.

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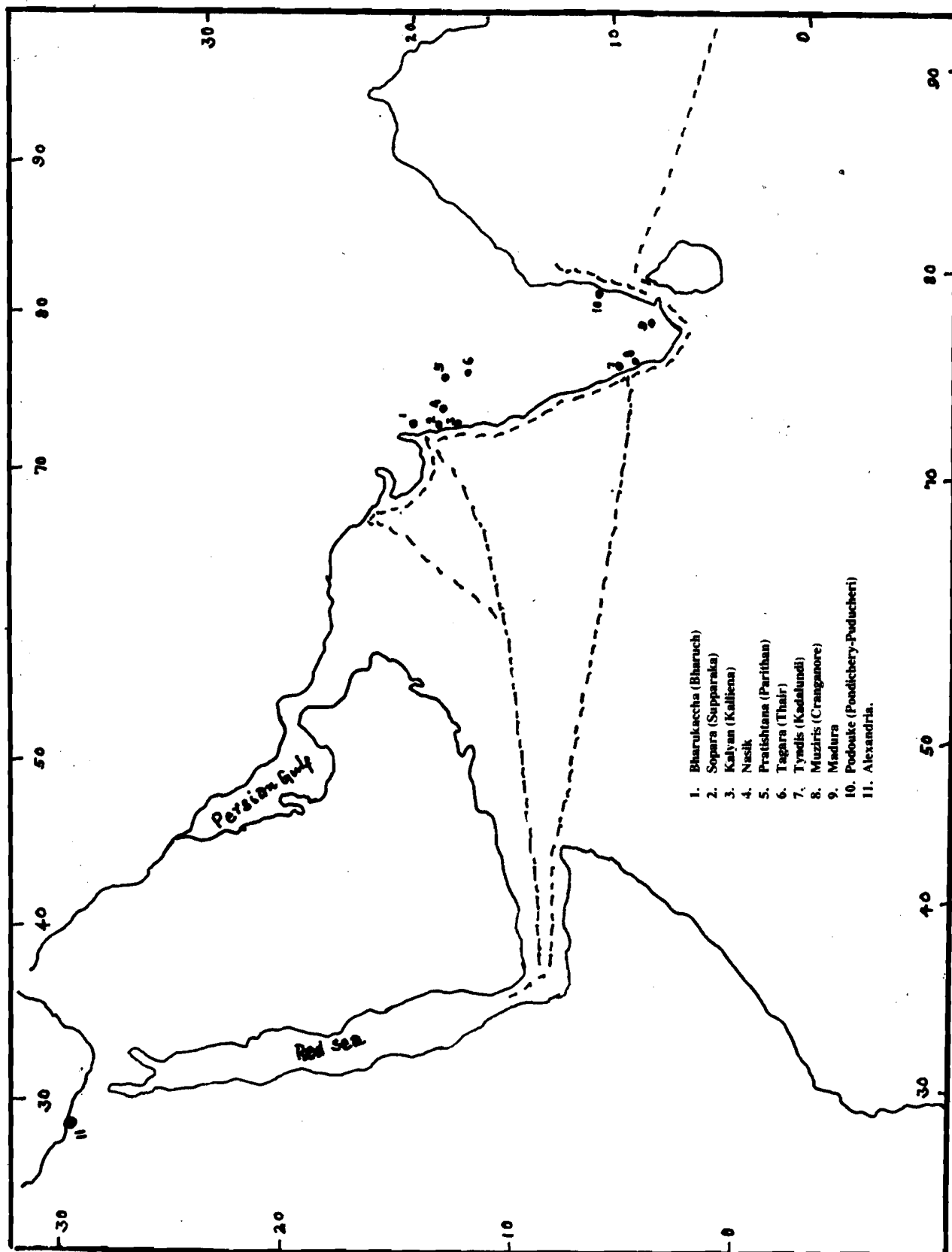
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SOUTH INDIA'S TRADE WITH THE WEST



The Romans brought to the south Indian ports their articles which included both raw materials and finished products. The raw materials consisted of copper, tin, lead, coral, topaz, flint, glass (as a few material for making beads).

The finished products were the best quality of wine, clothes of fine texture, fine ornaments, gold and silver coins and different types of excellent pottery.

A large number of articles were shipped by the Romans from peninsular India to the west. We shall identify the following categories among them.

- i) Spices and medicinal herbs like the pepper, spikenard, malabathrum, cinnabar;
- ii) Precious and semi-precious stones such as beryl, agate, Carnelian, Jasper and onyx as well as shells, pearls and tusk;
- iii) Timber items like ebony, teak, sandalwood, bamboo;
- iv) Textile item of coloured cotton cloth and muslin as well as dyes like indigo and lac.

Among the above items of export, beads and textile were the finished goods.

The Romans paid for the Indian articles mainly in gold. A majority of the export items were locally available, and the collection of merchandise in the Deccan and South India was done by the Indian merchants themselves. Wagons and pack animals were for transporting them to the ports.

The shipping of merchandise to the western lands was carried out mostly by the foreign merchants though there were Indian maritime traders in the Deccan and South India.

South India had commercial connections with Sri Lanka and South East Asia. The important articles of this trade were some spices, camphor and sandalwood.

Merchants of Tamil origin were probably responsible in taking the initiative in this trade. Sri Lankan merchants come to Tamilaham also. There are inscriptions written in Tamil Brahmi Characters which refer to those who come from Elam (Sri Lanka). However, details of this trade are not known.

30.3 ASPECTS OF COMMERCIAL ORGANISATION

In small scale local transactions quite often the producers were the dealers too.

Fishing and Salt making were done exclusively by the community of Paratavas, mentioned in the Sangam region as living in the nyal (coastal) region, and so they had to devote their whole time for these activities. Therefore, a different method was followed in the distribution of fish and salt.

Fish was taken to the neighbouring areas of the sea-coast by the womenfolk of the fishermen's family. They appeared in the places of village fairs and other rural gatherings. As an essential item salt was in demand everywhere. A separate group took to the distribution of salt. The salt merchants were known as umanas in Tamilaham.

In the Coastal areas and the neighbouring villages the **umana** hawker girls carried salt in head loads and bartered it mainly with paddy.

In the interior rural villages salt was taken by the umanas. Big bags of salt were transported in carts drawn by bullocks or asses. The salt merchants moved in large groups. These salt carvanas were called umanchathu. They bartered salt for the local products. Thus the umanchathu acted as the collectors of merchandise from different parts of the regions.

The umanas moved in caravans with their family. No organisation other than the family is known to have existed among the salt merchants.

Besides the salt dealers, there were dealers in corn (Koolavanikan) cloth (aruvaivanikan), gold (pon vanikan), sugar (panita vanikan) etc. They figure in some ancient cave inscriptions of Tamilaham as donors of dwelling places to some ascetics. This indicates that they were affluent. Details of their trade and organisation are not known. There is a single epigraphic reference to a traders' organisation of Tiruvellarai in the deep south. The members of the organisation at Tiruvellarai are described as **nikamattor** meaning the members of the **nigama**, a guild.

In Tamilaham the organisation of traders was perhaps a rare thing. But in the Deccan merchants' guilds or associations were a regular phenomenon. There were numerous

Another route ran from the Western hilly region to Kanchipuram which was a seat of a local chieftain and a famous 'City' on the east coast.

Salt-Caravans and other merchants were the travellers who traversed these routes. The Caravans moved in large groups. Besides merchants, very often wandering bards, dancers, messengers, mendicants etc. also moved from place to place along such routes. These groups chose to join the caravans because the journey was often hazardous. Most of the routes passed through dense forests and over hills where wild tribes lived. Wayside robbery was a perpetual threat to the merchants and the caravans employed guards of their own, in the absence of effective protection from the rulers.

In the territories under the Satavahanas the picture was somewhat different. The main route to the Deccan from the north came from Ujjaini to the city of Pratishthana (Paithan) the capital of the Satavahanas. From Pratishthana it passed across the Deccan Plateau to the lower Krishna and then went further south to reach the famous southern cities of Kanchi and Madurai. A network of roads developed early in the Christian era from this old route linking the producing areas in the interior with inland markets and towns and the port towns on the western coast. The fertile river valleys of Godavari and Krishna also had such network of routes to connect the interior with the coastal towns.

It is interesting to note that some of the famous ancient Buddhist cave sites and religious centres in the Deccan were situated on such trade routes. These religious centres were helpful in many ways to the merchant-caravans. Besides providing food and shelter they even issued loans.

The rulers also showed interest in the conditions of the routes. They donated liberally to Buddhist religious establishments which were located on the routes. They constructed rest houses at port towns and established watersheds on the routes. Officials also were appointed for the upkeep of them. Unfortunately information is not available regarding policing on the roads.

Often the routes had to cross over rivers. Ferries were established at such points and a toll was also collected from the merchants. Some of the ferries were toll-free.

Due to familiarity with a long coast-line and several rivery systems, navigation both on sea as well as river was known to the south Indians. Smaller boats were used for ferry-crossing and river navigation. Navigation on the sea was made possible by construction and use of bigger vessels.

Navigation in Tamilaham was mainly coastal. There were some trade connections with Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan (Elam) traders figure in some ancient inscriptions of south India. Similarly, Tamil traders appear as donors in some early inscriptions of Sri Lanka. These evidences show that traders from Tamilaham participated in maritime trade.

The Deccan too had merchants who were particularly engaged in sea-borne trade. Ships fitted out of Bharukaccha are known from literature of this period.

Merchants of peninsular India, particularly those of the Deccan, participated in foreign trade. The presence of some Indian traders in Egypt and Alexandria is attested by foreign writings of this period.

The royal authorities were aware of the importance of maritime trade. They provided facilities for the traders. The ships arriving at Bharukaccha were piloted by local boats and conducted to separate berths at the docks.

In the far south the big chieftains of Tamilaham encouraged sea-trade in different ways. Lighthouses were erected on the shores; there were wharves where the Roman ships unloaded their merchandise to be stamped with the chieftains emblem. Storage facilities were provided, and protection of goods was also arranged at the warehouses. Sea-borne trade in the far south as well as in the Deccan shows some features of what is described as "administered trade" by some modern scholars. The difference between the two regions is that the features are more prominent in the Deccan whereas in Tamilaham they are at the rudimentary level.

30.5 COINS AS MEDIA OF EXCHANGE

Though barter was the most common mode of transaction, the use of coins as a means of exchange became current in the period that we are discussing. The Coins which were

towns and each town seems to have had a guild or a nigama. Each guild had an elderman (Setthi) and its own office. The organisation of traders acted as a bank. It received deposits and lent out money. The guilds of weavers, potters, oil pressers, bamboo workers, braziers etc. are known from the inscriptions of the Deccan.

The guild as a working unit is more efficient than the family unit. Besides the strength of unity, guild was capable of providing all sorts of help to its members including financial assistance. Further, the individual member was relieved from the responsibility of finding out a customer.

Thus the territories under the Satavahanas had a comparatively advanced system in the organisation of trade.

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Write three features of the barter system in the ancient south India.

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- 2) Mark which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (x).

- a) Most of the items of barter were for luxury. ()
- b) 'Kurietirppai' means barter in which a loan of a fixed quantity of an article is taken to be repaid in the same kind and quantity at a later date. ()
- c) Kautilya thought that the southern route was superior because it was less dangerous than other routes. ()
- d) South India exported only raw material to the West and imported finished products from the West. ()
- e) The trade guilds in the Deccan acted as a bank which received deposits and lent out money. ()

- 3) Write about three lines on the Salt Caravans in Tamilaham.

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- 4) Write in five lines about the trade organisations in the Deccan.

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30.4 EXCHANGE FACILITIES

The question of facilities for transportation, storage and shipping is relevant particularly in the context of long distance trade in which the movement of bulk items is a problem. In the far south, pepper, paddy and salt were the main items which required movement in bulk. In western Deccan timber also was a bulk item of demand from the West. Pack animals and carts were used for inland transport.

In Tamilaham there were several routes which connected the interior tracts with the settlements in the river valleys, port towns and seats of rulers. One such route went from the western areas of the Kaveri valley to the Chola port town Kaveripumpattinam.

known to early peninsular India can broadly be divided into two broad categories:

- (*) Local coins of different varieties
- (*) Roman coins.

30.5.1 Local Coins

Local coins of different varieties were prevalent in different regions in peninsular India. Ancient Tamil literature speaks about some of them such as **Kasu, Kanam, Pon** and **Ven Pon**. But actual coins which may correspond to these names have not been discovered. In the Deccan, inscriptions refer to the use of **Kahapanas** which were silver coins locally minted and to **Suvarnas** which refer to gold coins either of the Romans or the **Kushans**.

Actual coins of different varieties and minted in different metals like lead, potin (Copper mixed with tin and other metals), copper and silver were in use. The earliest among them were punchmarked coins which, as you have learnt in Block IV, came to be minted in north-west and north India from 6th-5th century B.C. onward. In peninsular India too different varieties of punchmarked coins were minted in different regions. Other varieties of coins, manufactured by using other techniques like casting and die-striking, gradually came into use. From the second century B.C. Kings of small localities of members of the important **Maharathi** and other families started minting coins in their own name. To these were added coins of **Satavahana** rulers minted in different metals, possibly from the first century B.C. onward. In the northern Deccan, Gujarat, Malwa and adjacent regions, silver coins of the Kshatrapas were in great demand. Thus, between the second century B.C. and the close of the second century A.D., the largest varieties of local coins were minted and were in circulation in peninsular India.

30.5.2 Roman Coins

Ancient Tamil literature refers to **Yavana** (Roman) ships bringing large quantities of gold to Tamilaham to be exchanged for pepper. The Roman emperor Tiberius wrote to the Senate in 22 A.D. that the wealth of the empire was being drained off to foreign lands in exchange of petty things. In the 1st Century A.D., Pliny, the author of **The Natural History**, complained that every year a huge amount of Roman wealth went out to India, China and Arabia for luxury articles. These statements are well supported by the large number of Roman Coins found in hoards in various places of peninsular India like Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Most of the coins belong to a period between the 1st century B.C. and the 3rd Century A.D. This suggests that Roman Contact with peninsular India was brisk during this period.

The Roman coins are mostly in gold and silver. Copper coins are extremely rare but not altogether unknown.

Roman money was brought to purchase items which were dear to the Westerners. These items could not be procured by exchanging Roman things in bulk. Big transactions were done by means of gold coins. Silver coins were used for comparatively small purchases. Some scholars are of the view that Roman gold was accepted not as coin but as bullion. It is also held by certain scholars that Roman gold was used as ornament by the South Indians.

Some numismatists have maintained that the Roman coins and the punch-marked coins were current in the country side by side. The Roman coins were of roughly the same weight as the punch-marked coins. In some hoards they are found along with the punch-marked coins. Both types are equally worn out, and this suggests that they were current for a long time before they were placed in hoards. Imitations of Roman coins were also current in south India, especially on the Coromandal Coast, where there were some Roman trading stations. These imitated coins may have been manufactured to satisfy the needs of such 'colonies'.

30.6 REVENUE FROM TRADE

Collection of revenue as a regular source of income to the treasury depends on several factors including the efficiency of the government. Political developments in different regions in peninsular India in our period were not uniform in character. So the revenue

system also varied from region to region.

Toll was collected for merchandise moving on pack animals and carts. This toll was known as **Ulku**, a derivative of the Sanskrit term **sulka**, meaning toll. This seems to indicate that the idea of toll was borrowed from the north. However, all the crowned chieftains and the lesser chieftains of the south are said to have been interested in trade, especially with the **Yavanas**, evidently with an eye on the income from commerce.

In the Chola port town of Kaveripumpattinam there were the Chola ruler's agents to affix the Chola emblem of the tiger on the merchandise. Toll was also levied on the articles. Detailed information about this aspect is not available.

Further north, in the territory of the Satavahanas, taxation seems to have been more regular and systematic. Toll was collected on each item of trade. Custom duties and various tolls were levied on merchants at each major town. The rates of such duties and tolls are not specified anywhere. Ferry duties were another source of income.

Ushavdata, son-in-law and representative of the Kshatrapa ruler Nahapana of western India is said to have made arrangements for toll-free ferries on some rivers.

Revenue was received in kind or in cash.

Artisans had to pay tax on their products. This was known as **Karukara** (**Karu** = artisan and **Kara** = tax).

From this fragmentary information one can only say that the ruling authorities derived considerable income from trade and commerce.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Mention which of the following statements is right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - i) In Tamilaham there were several routes which connected the interior tracts with the settlements in river valleys, the coastal towns and the seats of ruling chieftains.
 - ii) Satavahana rulers established watersheds on the trade routes and appointed officials for the up keep of them.
 - iii) Whether found in the north or south the punch marked coins carried a standard weight.
 - iv) In ancient South India the Roman gold coins were used exclusively as ornaments.
 - v) The tax paid by the merchants was called Karukara.
- 2) Bring out the contrasting experience on the trade routes in ancient Deccan and South India in about 50 words.

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- 3) Write three lines on the local coins in South India.

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- 4) Write about five lines on the silver Punch-marked coin.

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5) Write seven lines on the Roman Coins and their use in South India.

30.7 WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

A developed system of exchange requires regular weights and measures. When it is possible to weigh, measure and count objects which one is buying or selling, exchange becomes both easy and efficient. The buyer and the seller do not have to feel uncertain about the quantity or size of the object bought or sold.

In the Deccan, where dealing with different kinds of items in the trading centres was a regular practice, the idea of exact measurements must have been prevalent. Coins were issued in different denominations, and land was measured in terms of **nivartanas**.

Ma and **Veli** were measures of land in the far south. Here, grain was measured in **ambanam**, probably a large measure, in the context of paying tributes. Smaller measures such as **nali**, **ulakku** and **alakku** were also known.

Weight was known by means of balance. Balance was perhaps a rod with marks on it. Even minute weight could be balanced for we are told about weighing gold on balance.

In the day-to-day transactions the linear measurement was expressed in terms of length of gingilly grain (**el**), paddy grain (**nel**), finger and hand.

30.8 URBAN CENTRES

In the course of the above discussion we touched upon various aspects of commercial expansion of trade in early peninsular India. This early trade provided great impetus to the rise and growth of a number of urban centres. We shall begin with the centres of the Deccan where the features of urban growth are clearly visible.

The Western and Eastern coasts had several port-towns. In the coastal Andhra region, in the delta of the Godavari and the Krishna, there were some important centres. Ships sailed from there to the Malay peninsula and eastern archipelago. The western port towns of Bharukaccha (Broach), Sopara and Kalyana however appear to be older and more important in the early phase of Indo-Roman trade.

In the interior there were big and small urban centres: Pratishthana (Paithan), Tagara (Ter), Bhogavardhana (Bhokardan), Karahataka (Karad), Nasik, Vijayanti, Dhanyakataka, Vijayapuri Nagarjunakonda etc. We may identify the following factors which led to the rise of these centres which were distinct from ordinary rural settlements:

- i) An agricultural hinterland capable of producing the necessary surplus for the consumption of different social groups living in urban centres.
- ii) Emergence of such groups as those of traders, artisans and handicraftsmen who were not directly involved in food production.
- iii) Emergence of the guilds which organized the activities of traders and craftsmen.
- iv) Facilities for collection of commodities required in local and foreign exchange and development of shipping.
- v) A ruling class capable of channelising the surplus to the centres and also providing help and protection.
- vi) Emergence of a monetary system.
- vii) Spread of writing which is essential for accounting and registering.

Functionally, the urban centres belonged to different categories: Administrative centres, collection centres, cantonments, centres of foreign trade, markets and manufacturing centres. However, most of these functions could be carried out at a single urban centre.

Three distinct types of centres can be identified in the Tamilaham mostly on the basis of references in Sangam poems and other literary writings and to some extent on the basis of archaeology:

- rural exchange centres,
- inland market towns, and
- port towns.

In the process of exchanging articles for subsistence between the different *tinai*s or eco-zones, there emerged several centres as points of contact. These contact points were often junctions on the traditional routes.

Some of these centres became more active because of regular exchange activities. It will not be appropriate to call them 'urban' in the modern sense of that term. However, the contemporary society viewed them as distinct from ordinary peasant settlements. Inland towns like Uraiyur (near modern Tiruchirapalli) Kanchi (Kanchipuram) and Madurai had markets. They too had not developed into full-fledged urban centres.

Pattinams or port-towns were more active under the patronage of the rulers. There were several such centres. On the east coast: Puhar or Kaveripumpattinam (of the Cholas), Arikamdu, Korhai (of the Pandyas); On the west coast: Muziris and Tyndis (of the Cheras), Bakare and Neleynda. They were centres of maritime trade and some of them like Arikamedu had 'colonies' of the 'Yavanas'. Muziris was a busy centre with a port crowded with ships of all kinds, with large warehouses and markets.

Since the emphasis of trade at the port-towns was on luxury items, the **pattinams** were not closely linked with the local exchange network. They remained as "pockets of foreign trade" with mainly the rulers and the rich as the clientele. The growth of these centres was thus a result of external trade. With the decline of external trade, these centres too dwindled and disappeared slowly.

The nature of these urban centres was thus characterized by the absence of:

- a) linkage with the local exchange networks
- b) craft specialisation
- c) support of such institutions as monastery and guild.

30.9 THE IMPACT OF TRADE AND URBAN CENTRES ON SOCIETY

Early trade and urban developments do not seem to have brought about very fundamental changes in the social life of Tamilaham. Local exchange was subsistence-oriented. This means that the items which changed hands through local exchange were used for regular consumption by different groups of people. Long distance trade was mostly in luxury goods which did not circulate beyond the kinship circles of the chieftains and their men.

Individual merchants' wealth and prosperity, as seen in their gifts to monks, were not very impressive.

Craftsmen and traders were not organised in guilds. They functioned together as members of a family or as close relatives. They thus acted only according to the norms of the kind relations of a tribal nature.

In the Deccan the situation was different. The participation of local trading groups was necessary also for long-distance trade. So the advantage of this trade filtered down to the other levels of society. The wealth and prosperity of the artisans, craftsman and traders are reflected in their donations to the Buddhist monasteries.

The guild organisations of artisans and traders were instrumental in breaking old kinship ties and introducing a new type of relations in production of handicrafts and in trading ventures.

The relationship between rulers, commercial groups and Buddhist monastic establishments was responsible in introducing important changes in society and economy of the Deccan.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Mark right (✓) or wrong (×) statements given below:

- a) **Ma** and **Veli** were linear measurements ()
- b) Inland towns were more active than the coastal towns in early South India ()
- c) Guilds introduced some change in the production relations among the artisans and traders ()
- d) The circulation of the luxury good was among the members of the crowned monarchs and their family ()
- e) Long distance trade was not dependent on the local exchange net works in the Deccan ()

2) Write five lines on the relations between the monasteries and the traders.

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3) Write five lines on the impact of trade and urbanism on the local traders and artisans.

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30.10 LET US SUM UP

Our attempt in this Unit was to discuss with you certain important aspects of expansion of trade and of urban centres in ancient peninsular India. You have learnt from this Unit about:

- Different types of trade and ways in which exchange was carried on,
- Guilds of artisans and traders,
- Exchange facilities like transportation, storage and shipping,
- Different kinds of coins which were used as means of exchange,
- Revenue from trade,
- Distinctive features and functions of urban centres, and
- Impact of trade and urbanism in different regions of peninsular India.

30.11 KEY WORDS

Punch-marked coins: In manufacturing these coins, the metal was beaten into flat sheets and then cut into strips. The blank sheets were cut into desired weights. The blank pieces were square or rectangular in the first instance. For getting the actual weight the edges were clipped. So most of the coins are irregular in shape. Symbols were stamped on them with punches, each punch having one distinct symbol.

Administered trade: This refers to trade in which existed centres of trade offering facilities like those of anchorage and storage, civil and legal protection, and agreement on the mode of payment.

Nigama: A guild of traders or artisans.

Potini: An alloy of copper and tin.

30.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-section 30.2.1
- 2) (a) (×)
(b) (✓)
(c) (×)
(d) (×)
(e) (✓)
- 3) See Section 30.3
- 4) See Section 30.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) (✓)
ii) (✓)
iii) (✓)
iv) (×)
v) (×)
- 2) See Section 30.4
- 3) See Section 30.5
- 4) See Section 30.5
- 5) See Section 30.5

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) (a) (×)
(b) (×)
(c) (✓)
(d) (×)
(e) (×)
- 2) See Section 30.8
- 3) See Section 30.9

UNIT 31 GROWTH OF TAMIL LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Structure

- 31.0 Objectives
- 31.1 Introduction
- 31.2 Early Evidences
- 31.3 Heroic Poems
 - 31.3.1 Classification
 - 31.3.2 Techniques of Composition
 - 31.3.3 Problems of Dating
 - 31.3.4 The Poetics
 - 31.3.5 Literary Development
- 31.4 Other Compositions
- 31.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 31.6 Key Words
- 31.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise

31.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn:

- how old is the Tamil language and literature,
- what are the Tamil Heroic Poems,
- how were they composed and classified,
- what are their literary merits, and
- which are the other compositions of the period.

31.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Units you learnt how settlements grew up, agriculture began to expand and trade flourished in Tamilzakkam. Trade brings in immigrants and opens up avenues of interaction between local people and outsiders within the region. Interaction of cultures helps the growth of language and literature in a region. In this Unit you will be made familiar with the growth of the Tamil language and literature.

31.2 EARLY EVIDENCES

Tamil had become a literary language i.e., a full-blown language with its own system of writing, at least by third century B.C. if not earlier. The earliest evidence for the Tamil literary tradition i.e. the tradition of writings in the language comes from the Tamil Brahmi inscriptions in the Jain and Buddhist caves from the Tamil Brahmi hills. These inscriptions are in the form of labels of persons or bodies who donated the caverns. The major centres of these label inscriptions are Arittappatti (Maugulam, Madurai), Karungalakkuti (Melur, Madurai), Kongarpuliyamkulam (Madurai), Azakarmalai (Madurai). Many Tamil words along with the local adaptations of Sanskrit and Prakrit/Pali occur in the labels. Nigamattor (the member of a nigaman and Vanikan (he who is engaged in Vanibham trade) may be cited as two examples for the Tamil adaptations of the Sanskrit words. It has to be noted that the Tamil language used in these labels was different from the literary Tamil. The difference was due to the Jain and Buddhist immigrants from the north who were introducing a (considerable member) of Sanskrit and Prakrit/Pali terms. These terms were adapted to suit the linguistic structure of the Tamil language. The combination of names of persons, professions and places that figure in the inscriptions gives clues to the currency of Tamil as a literary language. The period of these label inscriptions is roughly between c. 200 B.C. and A.D. 300. The Tamil heroic poems, popularly called the Sangam literature, constitute the major evidence for the old Tamil literary tradition.

31.3 HEROIC POEMS

The Tamil heroic poems are called the **Sangam** literature since they were collected and classified by the **Sangam** which was an academy of scholars. Poems by themselves were not the product of the **Sangam**. The poems were, in fact, much earlier than the **Sangam**. The history of the **Sangam** is clogged in legends. Tradition says that there were originally three **Sangams** among which the works of the last one alone have survived. Previously it was believed that the **Sangams** were academies of court poets. But now it is a matter of consensus that they were constituted by scholars in literature. The time lag between the **Sangam** and the heroic poems shows that the name **Sangam** literature is a misnomer. By and large the Tamil heroic poems were the products of the folk. They signify the tradition of bards who roamed about singing the praise of their patron chiefs. However, all the poetic compositions were not of wandering bards. Some of them were composed by scholarly poets who followed the bardic tradition. Kapilar, Parinar, Avvayar and Gautamanar were some of the well known poets of the period. They were scholarly bards, namely the **pulavar** as distinguished from the common bards, namely the **panar**. It is thus not the literature of any particular social group but part of a common way of life. Spanned over a few centuries, the poems reflect the gradual development of the Tamil language and literature. They survive not in their original independent form, but as classified anthologies or choice collections.

31.3.1 Classification

Now we see the poems in the form of classified collections of specific poetic themes and conventions. **Ettutogai** or the eight collections of poems and **Pattupattu** or the ten idylls are the two categories of anthologies that comprise the heroic poems. **Narrinai**, **Kuruntokai**, **Ainkurunuru**, **Patirrupattu** etc. are the few examples of anthologies grouped under **Ettutogai**, **Mullaippattu**, **Madurikkani**, **Kurunjippattu** etc. are the example of anthologies under **Pattupattu**. (See the table) The anthologies are divided into **akam**, dealing with themes of subjective experience like love or affection, and **puram**, dealing with themes of objectification like raid or plunder. Both the above categories of anthologies comprise collections of poems based on **akam** and **puram** themes. **Akananuru**, a collection of four hundred poems based on **akam** themes and **Purananuru**, a similar collection based on **puram** themes are two examples of **Ettutogai** category. In the same manner there are examples of both **akam** and **puram** anthologies in the **Pattupattu** category. Apart from the heroic anthologies, the classified corpus of Sangam literature includes **Tolkappiyam**, a treatise on Tamil grammar and **Patinenkizkanakku**, the eighteen didactic texts also. The famous **Tirukkural** by Tiruvalluvar is one of the eighteen didactic texts. Both **Tolkappiya** and **Patinenkizkanakku** were composed after most of the **Ettutogai** and **Pattupattu** poems had been composed. The diction and the techniques of composition of the heroic anthologies keep them distinct from other texts that are later.

31.3.2 Techniques of Composition

The heroic poems were composed on the principles of oral bardic literature. The features of oral compositions are strikingly similar all over the world. The use of stock phrases and expressions is the most important feature. Stock phrases or expressions are readymade expressions or phrases current among the people of those times. The poets knew the contexts of the ready made expressions and where to use them and how in their poems. Poems are composed using the set motifs or readymade expressions, in a formula that is orally transmitted and commonly shared by the bards as well as the society. The set expressions required for poetising the variety of contexts recur in the poems. For instance, if the context is to praise a chieftain, the series of stock forms like "warrior of victorious lance", "possessor of lofty chariots", "chieftain of swift steeds", "hero of eyefilling garlands" and so on flow effortlessly whoever the poet is or the chieftain. These examples show that the bards just had to master such ready-made expressions and their contexts. This is not to minimise the individual poetic talents completely. But by and large, the most important aspect was not the individual style or expressions of the poets. The technique of versification in oral poetry depended on the general or common styles and expressions. It is a technique of combining the set phrases over which the poets as well as the society by and large had mastery. So there are repeated lines and themes with marginal modifications in different poems by different

poets. The hereditarily transmitted stock phrases leave the bulk of heroic poems full of old memory. This is one of the many hazards in dating the poems.

31.3.3 Problems of Dating

The corpus of the **Sangam** literature cannot be precisely dated owing to a series of problems. In fact, several periods are represented in the poems of Sangam anthologies. One is the period of actual composition and oral transmission, which is fairly long and spread over a few centuries from about 2nd century B.C. to A.D. 3rd century. Next is the period of the codification of the poems into anthologies, which is between circa 6th and 9th centuries. Another period is that of the commentaries which are not earlier than 13th-14th centuries. **Tolkappiyam**, the traditional grammatical treatise in its present form is not earlier than the 3rd century A.D. though the basic parts of the text could be slightly earlier. All the **Kizkanakku** texts belong to a period later than 3rd century A.D. The great difficulty in dating the **Sangam** literature is that it is hard to clearly sort out the earlier from the later as they are all mixed up.

31.3.4 The Poetics

Based on the Sangam literature, there developed a fairly evolved set of poetic conventions. Though the poetics as such as a little later, the rules and conventions of composition were part of the old Tamil bardic tradition. The two fundamental aspects of the traditional Tamil poetics are the divisions of compositions into **akam** and **puram** genres. We have already noted what is **akam** and what is **puram** in a previous section. **Akam** is subdivided into five stages of love in relation to the five **tinai**s. Each **tinai** is associated with a particular mood of love. For instance, the **palai** is associated with the sentiment of separation of the lovers. The **puram** genre of poems have their own **tinai**s (situations) and **turai**s (contexts). There are as many as nine **tinai**s and sixty three **turai**s which the poets could opt for the compositions. Both the **akam** and **puram** genres of poems followed the fixed conventions of each. Each **akam** poem had to follow the notion of **tinai** which had its own deity, biological organisms, subsistence pattern, musical instruments and songs. Similarly, each **puram** poem had to abide by the restrictions associated with the variety of **tinai**s or situations of behaviour.

31.3.5 Literary Development

The Tamil literary tradition is independent of the classical Sanskrit literary tradition of India. It represents a parallel linguistic tradition in relation to Sanskrit. However, the development of the Tamil language and literature was never a process in isolation. Even the earliest stratum of the Tamil literature contains influences of Sanskrit. The heroic poems and the other **Sangam** works contain traces of Aryan culture. By Aryan culture we mean Vedic ideas and institutions in this context. The tradition of Vedic rituals is well attested by the poems. Some of the bards like Gautamanar, Parananar and Kapilar were Brahmanas. Gautamanar is mentioned to have effeciated many **velvi** (**Yajna** or Vedic sacrifice) for his patron Celkezu Kuttuvan, Cera chief. Epic and puranic ideas are also seen in the Tamil heroic poems. While praising the patron chiefs, the poets refer to the farmer's participation in the Mahabharata battle. Many puranic deities are equated to their Tamil Counterparts. Mayon (the black god) well known in the poems as the Tamil counterpart of Krishna is one example. But these influences never undermined what was typical of the Tamil literary tradition. This original aspect of the Tamil language and literature does not owe to Sanskrit for its origin. But its growth and development toward linguistic and literary perfection certainly owes to the influences of Aryan culture. The heroic poems and other works of the **Sangam** tradition testify the widespread literary culture of early Tamizakam. They also indicate the linguistic maturity achieved by the Tamils by the 3rd century.

31.4 OTHER COMPOSITIONS

The basic parts of **Tolkappiyam** and some of the **Kizkanakku** texts constitute the other compositions here. These are called the other compositions because they do not belong to the bardic tradition of heroic poems. But they are not far removed from the literary background of the bardic tradition. The **poruladikaram** part of **Tolkappiyam** that deals with the **akam** and **puram** conventions of old Tamil is close to the period of heroic

poems. Similarly, the **tinai** texts and works like **Kalavazi** are relatively earlier. Though some scholars regard the twin epics **Silappadikaram** and **Manimekhalai** as contemporaneous to the heroic poems, they are identified as works of a much later period.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×):
 - i) The **Sangam** literature belongs to a uniform period.
 - ii) The name **Sangam** literature is a misnomer.
 - iii) The heroic poems are composed using set phrases and expressions.
 - iv) The development of the Tamil language and literature was a process in isolation.
- 2) What do you know about the literary conventions of the Tamil bardic tradition?
Answer in ten lines.

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31.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you learnt about how old the Tamil literature is and what it is constituted by. You also learnt about the main features of heroic poems, their techniques of composition and problems of dating. Another point you learnt was the level of literary and linguistic development of old Tamil. You could also understand how the works in old Tamil were classified and codified into anthologies during the **Sangam** period.

31.6 KEY WORDS

Sangam: An academy of scholars that collected and classified old Tamil works.

Akam: A genre of poems dealing with subjective experience like love.

Puram: A genre of poems dealing with objectifiable experience like raid or plunder.

Bard: He who roams about composing and singing poems in praise of his patrons.

Turai: A poetic convention indicating the thematic situation of **puram** poems.

Didactic: Poetry or text which intends to teach moral lesson is called **Didactic** poetry or text.

UNIT 32 RISE AND GROWTH OF GUPTAS

Structure

- 32.0 Objectives
- 32.1 Introduction
- 32.2 Political Background
 - 32.2.1 North-western and Northern India
 - 32.2.2 Western and Central India
 - 32.2.3 The Deccan and South India
- 32.3 The Rise of the Guptas
 - 32.3.1 Samudragupta
 - 32.3.2 Expansion and Consolidation
- 32.4 Chandragupta-II
- 32.5 Kumaragupta-I
- 32.6 Skandagupta
- 32.7 Disintegration of the Gupta Empire
- 32.8 Let us Sum Up
- 32.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

32.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you shall be able to:

- know about the political conditions in India at the beginning of the fourth century A.D.,
- familiarise yourself with the circumstances that led to the rise of Gupta power,
- know about the expansion and consolidation of the Gupta empire,
- understand the order of succession of the Gupta rulers and their military exploits, and
- understand the process that led to the decline of Guptas.

32.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, after briefly discussing the political situation of the fourth century A.D. we go on to analyse the historical situation which led to the rise of the Gupta dynasty. The attempt here will be to give you a political outline of the period. We take into account the controversies relating to the succession of Gupta kings and at the same time discuss some of their achievements which made possible the formation and consolidation of the empire. Kings like Samudragupta, Chandragupta-II, Kumaragupta and Skandagupta figure very prominently in the history of the empire. The Unit also takes into account some of the problems faced by the Gupta kings and the factors responsible for the decline of Gupta rule.

32.2 POLITICAL BACKGROUND

In the beginning of the fourth century A.D. no large state structure existed in India. You have read in Blocks VI and VII that in the post-Mauryan period two large state structures had emerged in north India and in the Deccan. These were the Kushana state of the north and the Satavahana state of the Deccan. But although the Kushanas and Saka chiefs continued to rule even in early fourth century A.D., their power had become considerably weak, and the Satavahana state had disappeared before the middle of the third century A.D. This does not however mean that there was complete political vacuum. There was no major political power but there were minor powers and new families of rulers were emerging. It was in this situation that the Guptas, a family of uncertain origins, began to build up an empire from the beginning of the fourth century A.D. Before we take up the history of this empire, we present an outline of the political situation of this period by taking up different regions separately.

32.2.1 North-western and Northern India

Before the middle of the third century A.D. the rule of the Sassanians had been established in Iran and the Sassanian rulers started claiming overlordship over Kushana kings. The mighty Kushana kings of north-western India were reduced to the position of subordinates and the Sassanian authority also extended to Sindh and certain other areas.

However, a large number of coins which are based on earlier Kushana coins and are found in Afghanistan and Punjab suggest that several branches of rulers, some Kushana, continued to rule in the region. There are also the coins of Kidara Kushana and his successors, in Afghanistan, Kashmir and western Punjab and it is possible that some of these rulers were contemporaries of the early Gupta rulers.

In other parts of the Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, old coins again point to the existence of a number of republican states. These were states which were not ruled by a single king but possibly by several chiefs; it was only occasionally that one finds a chief claiming the status of the King of a clan. The Madras, mentioned in connection with the exploits of the Gupta ruler Samudragupta, were located in the Punjab; the Yaudheyas were extremely powerful with their centre in present-day Haryana and the Malavas were located in Rajasthan. There were many other republican states like these, and some of them are even mentioned in the Gupta records.

Several branches of the Nagas who became very powerful in Mathura and other centres after the decline of Kushana power in north India are also known. Some of the north Indian rulers who were defeated by Samudragupta were definitely of Naga origin.

32.2.2 Western and Central India

You have read in Block 6 that a branch of Kshatrapa rulers established themselves in Western India in the post-Mauryan period. The line of Chastana, to which the well-known Saka Kshatrapa Rudradaman belonged, continued to rule till 304 A.D. and then a new line of rulers began to rule. However, Kshatrapa rule came to an end towards the close of the fourth century A.D. when Gupta ruler Chandragupta-II conquered and annexed their territories.

In the region of ancient Vidarbha, the core of which was Nagpur in northeast Maharashtra, a new power had emerged by the middle of the third century A.D. This power was that of the Vakatakas, a new line of rulers started by Vindhyasakti. Vakataka power soon became formidable and a branch was also established at Vatsagulma (modern Basim in Akola district). The Vakataka family later on came into close contact with the Guptas, particularly after a matrimonial alliance was formed between the two families.

32.2.3 The Deccan and South India

The decline of the Satavahana state of the Deccan was followed by the emergence of a number of new royal families in different parts of the Deccan. In coastal Andhra, there was a succession of families like the Ikshvakus, the Salankayanas and others. In Karnataka, the most important ruling family was that of the Kadambas. The Kadamba power was founded by Brahmin Mayurasarman whose Talagunda inscription gives some interesting details of the circumstances leading to the establishment of the kingdom and also some ideas regarding its extent. The ruling family of the Pallavas, which became a formidable power in Tamilnadu till the ninth century is known from their records to have started ruling from the middle of the third century A.D. The inscriptions of the early Pallava rulers were written in the Prakrit language and were in the form of copper plates. They are generally assigned to the period between century 250–350 A.D. Sivaskandarasman of this family, who ruled in the beginning of the fourth century A.D., was a powerful ruler and his kingdom included parts of Andhra, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. Kanchi or Kanchipuram in the Chingleput district of Tamilnadu became the capital of the Pallavas and when Gupta ruler Samudragupta led an expedition to the south, he encountered Pallavan king Vismigopa at Kanchi. The above sketch does not mention many areas and many ruling families but only those who were comparatively important. It must however be noted that in many areas like Bengal, Orissa, forest regions of Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere kingdoms were emerging for the first time. This was a new trend and was very significant for the later course of political history.

The ancestry and early history of the Gupta family are little known, and have naturally given rise to various speculations. Names ending in Gupta, such as Sivagupta which occurs in a Satavahana inscription, are sometimes taken to suggest their ancestry. But these suggestions are rather far-fetched. Different scholars also place the original home of the Guptas differently: Some would place it in north Bengal, some in Magadha in Bihar and some in U.P. on the basis of the following arguments it may, at the moment, be suggested that the original core of the Gupta territory lay in eastern U.P.:

- Allahabad pillar inscription, the earliest inscription recording the achievements of an early Gupta ruler, Samudragupta, comes from this region.
- The nature of the coin-hoards of the Guptas, found in this region, suggests this
- The description of early Gupta territories in the *Puranas* may point to this.

It is possible that in the closing decades of the 3rd century A.D. the Guptas were subordinates of a branch of the later Kushanas ruling in north-western India. However, literary and archaeological sources indicate that they became independent in the second decade of the fourth century A.D.

Inscriptions tell us that Srigupta was the first king and Ghatotkacha was the next to follow him. Chandragupta-I was the first independent king with the title **Maharajadhiraja**. After declaring his independence in Magadha, he with the help of a matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis, enlarged his kingdom. We know about this alliance from a special category of coins. These coins have Chandragupta and his queen Kumaradevi engraved on the obverse and a seated goddess on the reverse with a legend **Lichchhavayah** (i.e. the Lichchhavis). These coins were made of gold, and this fact in addition to the fact that the Guptas followed the weight system of Kushana gold coins suggests that the Guptas had been in contact with the Kushana territories.

There are no concrete evidences to determine the boundaries of Chandragupta's kingdom. But it is assumed that it covered parts of Bihar, U.P. and Bengal.

Chandragupta-I is said to have also started a new era from 319-320 A.D. It is not clear from any records that he started this era, which came to be known as **Gupta Samvat** or Gupta era, but since Chandragupta-I is mentioned as a **Maharajadhiraja** he is credited with the founding of the era. It was during the times of his son Samudragupta that the kingdom grew into an empire.

32.3.1 Samudragupta

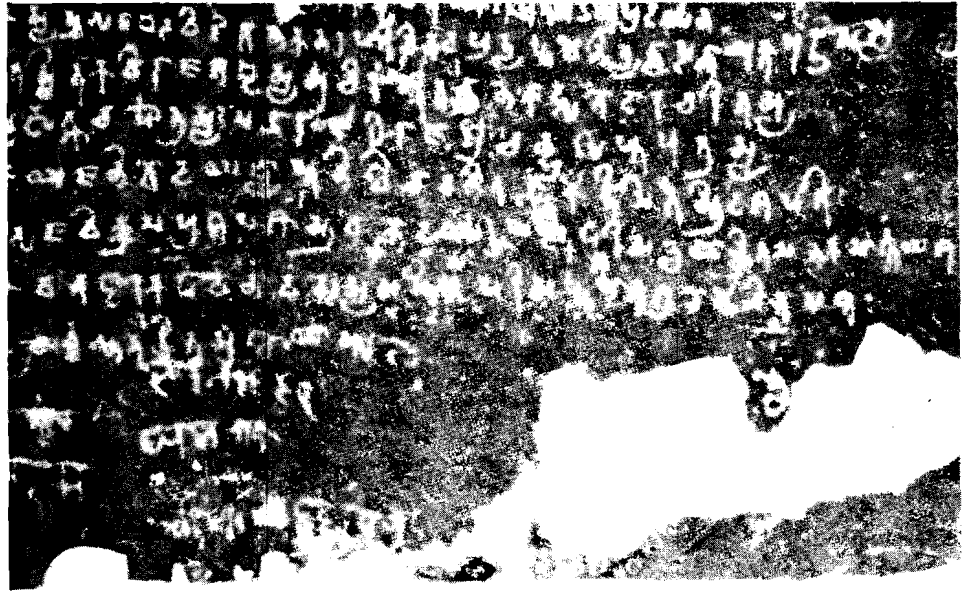
An inscription engraved (at a later date) on the Asokan pillar at Allahabad (known as **Prayagprasasti**) gives us information about Samudragupta's accession and conquests. Harishena, an important official of the state, had composed 33 lines which were engraved on the pillar. The inscription mentions that **Maharajadhiraja** Chandragupta-I in a highly emotional tone declared his son Samudragupta as his successor. This caused joy among the courtiers and heart-burning among those of equal birth. It can be presumed that other princes might have put forward their contending claims which were put to rest by this declaration. Further, the discovery of some gold coins bearing the name of Kacha has generated a controversy relating to this. The controversy has arisen because:

- i) in many respects Kacha's coins are similar to the coins of Samudragupta,
- ii) the name of Kacha does not appear in the official lists of Gupta rulers, as they are available in the Gupta inscriptions.

Various interpretations have been given in this regard:

- According to one interpretation Samudragupta's brothers revolted against him and placed Kacha, the eldest brother, on the throne. However he died in the war of succession.
- Another view mentions that these coins were issued by Samudragupta in the memory of his brother.
- A third view mentions Kacha as the initial name of Samudragupta and the later name was adopted only after the conquest of south.

There is no solution to the controversy as each view has arguments in favour or against. We could only say that since the number of Kacha coins found so far is somewhat limited his hold over the throne would have been for a very short duration. Also that Samudragupta, inspite of Chandragupta's abdication, did face problems in relation to accession to the throne but ultimately he emerged victorious.



1. The Prayagaprasasti of Samudragupta

32.3.2 Expansion and Consolidation

For the expansion and consolidation of the Gupta power Samudragupta adopted an aggressive policy of conquests. This initiated a process which culminated in the formation of the Gupta empire. However, we have to take note here of the fact that in certain regions—particularly in the South—he let the kings, whom he had defeated, rule over their regions. Of course, they accepted his suzerainty and paid tributes. Such a policy adopted in relation to the far-flung areas might have paid dividends in solving problems of communication and effective control, hence bringing about stability for the time being. Let us briefly discuss the aggressive campaigns taken by Samudragupta in various regions. We may mention again that we come to know about all the campaigns of Samudragupta only from one record, the **Prayagaprasasti** of Harishena.

1) Campaigns in Aryavarta:

Some historians are of the view that Samudragupta carried his victorious campaign of Aryavarta at one time. However, some other historians, assuming that the **Prayagaprasasti** mentions the conquests of Samudragupta in a chronological order, have opined that there were two campaigns in north India. This is because the **prasasti** first mentions three Aryavarta kings, then it goes on to mention his southern campaign and again mentions nine Aryavarta kings. It appears that taking advantage of the war of succession, which Samudragupta had to face, certain rulers attempted to establish their dominance. It might be in this context that Samudragupta defeated Achyuta, Nagasena and Kota-Kulaja. There are no details regarding these conquests or regarding the identity of the specific regions over which they ruled. However, historians have identified Achyuta as ruling over Ahichchatra, Nagasena over Gwalior area and Kota-Kulaja or ruler of the Kota family in east Punjab and Delhi. Though differences continue to prevail over these identifications it is clear that Samudragupta, after defeating them, established firm control not only over the Ganga Valley but also over some adjacent regions.

2) Campaign in South:

The **Prayagaprasasti** mentions twelve rulers from **dakshinapatha** or south India who were defeated by Samudragupta. These were:

- Mahendra of Kosala (Raipur, Durg, Sambalpur and Bilaspur districts)
- Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara (Jeypore, forest region of Orissa)
- Mantaraja of Kaurata (Probably Sonpur area in Madhya Pradesh or Plain country to the north-east of Mahendra hill)
- Mahendragiri of Pishtapura (Pithasuram, East Godavari district)
- Svamidatta of Kottura (Ganjam district)
- Damana of Erandapalla (Chicacole or West Godavari district)

- Vishnugopa of Kanchi (Chingleput district)
- Nilaraja of Avamukta (Godavari Valley)
- Hasti-varman of Vengi (Cellor in the Krishna-Godavari delta)
- Ugresena of Palakka (Nellore district)
- Kubera of Devarastra (Yellamanchiti in Visakhapatnam district), and
- Dhananjaya of Kushthapura (possibly in North Arcot district in Tamilnadu)

However, again there are differences among historians as to the specific identifications of these kings and their kingdoms. The *Prayagaprasasti* says that Samudragupta showed favour to be **Dakshinapatha** kings by first capturing them (**grahana**) and then releasing them (**moksha**). He pursued a completely different policy with regard to the kings of **Aryavarta** or north India. He not only defeated them but also annexed their territories which became integrated into the Gupta empire. The north Indian kings defeated by Samudragupta were: Rudradwa, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarman, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Archyuta, Nandi, Balavarmna and others. It is impossible to identify all of them, but it is certain that they were ruling in different parts of northern India. Some of them were obviously Naga rulers who had been powerful in several regions before the Guptas. Rulers like Chandravarman who ruled in West Bengal represented new ruling families. The *Prasasti* further says that Samudragupta reduced all states in the forest regions to the position of servants. In another category are mentioned the frontier kingdoms like Samatata (in southeast Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam), Nepala (Nepal) and others and the republican states of the Malavas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, etc. They paid him tributes of all kinds, carried out his orders and paid him homage. Rulers of another category of states acknowledged his sovereignty in a different way. They pleased him by "self-surrender, offering (their own) daughters in marriage, and a request for the administration of their own districts and provinces". This means that they remained independent but their independence had to be approved by Samudragupta. In this category were included the foreign rulers of north-western India like the later Kushanas and the Saka chief and residents of different island countries including Simhala or Sri Lanka.

Many of the claims made by Harishena, the composer of *Prayagaprasasti*, are highly exaggerated but many of the claims are also genuine. The military foundations of the Gupta empire were laid by Samudragupta; his successors built upon these foundations.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Fill in the blanks:
 - a) At the beginning of the fourth century A.D. there were (Many/no) small kingdoms in North India.
 - b) Chandragupta-I had a matrimonial alliance with (Sakas/Lichchavis)
 - c) The *Prayagaprasasti* refers to the victories of (Pravarsena/Samudragupta).
- 2) Discuss in about ten lines the efforts made by Samudragupta for the expansion of Gupta empire.

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- 3) List five minor powers in north India at the beginning of fourth century A.D.

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32.4 CHANDRAGUPTA-II

The Gupta inscriptions mention Chandragupta-II as Samudragupta's successor. But on the basis of literary sources, some copper coins and inscriptions it is suggested that the successor was Samudragupta's other son Ramagupta. Visakhadatta's drama **Devi Chandraguptam** mentions that Chandragupta-II killed his elder brother Ramagupta. He did this because Ramagupta was facing defeat at the hands of the Sakas and in order to save the kingdom, he had agreed to surrender his wife to the Saka king. Chandragupta protested, and went to the Saka camp in the disguise of the queen Dhruvadevi. He was successful against the Saka king but as a result of the subsequent hostility with his brother he killed him and married his wife Dhruvadevi. Certain other texts like the **Harsacharita**, **Kavyamimansa**, etc. also refer to this episode. Some copper coins bearing the name Ramagupta have also been found and inscriptions on the pedestals of some Jaina images found at Vidisa, bear the name Maharaja Ramgupta. Similarly, Dhruvadevi is described as mother of Govindagupta (Chandragupta's son) in a Vaisali seal. We can say that Chandragupta ascended the throne at a time when there were problems emerging again and he had to lead military campaigns to establish Gupta supremacy once again. He entered into matrimonial alliances with the Nagas by marrying princess Kuberanaga whose daughter Prabhavati was later on married to Rudrasena-II of the Vakataka family. Though there is no record like the **Prayagaprasasti** to describe the events of his reign we do get information about Chandragupta's campaigns and successes from certain inscriptions, literary sources and coins: He defeated the Saka king Rudrasimha-III and annexed his kingdom. This brought an end to Saka Kshatrapa rule in western India and added the regions of Gujarat, Kathiawad and west Malwa to the Gupta empire. The details of Chandragupta-II's campaigns against the Sakas are not known. His matrimonial alliances with the Vakatakas and the Nagas must have been of tremendous significances in his preparations for the campaigns. Two inscriptions at the Udayagiri caves near Sanchi and one inscription at Sanchi, all referring to Chandragupta II and to his subordinate rulers and military officials, also suggest that he was present in eastern Malwa for some time preparing for the campaigns. One inscription describes him as "desirous of conquering the whole earth". That his conquest of the territories of the Sakas was complete is proved beyond doubt because:

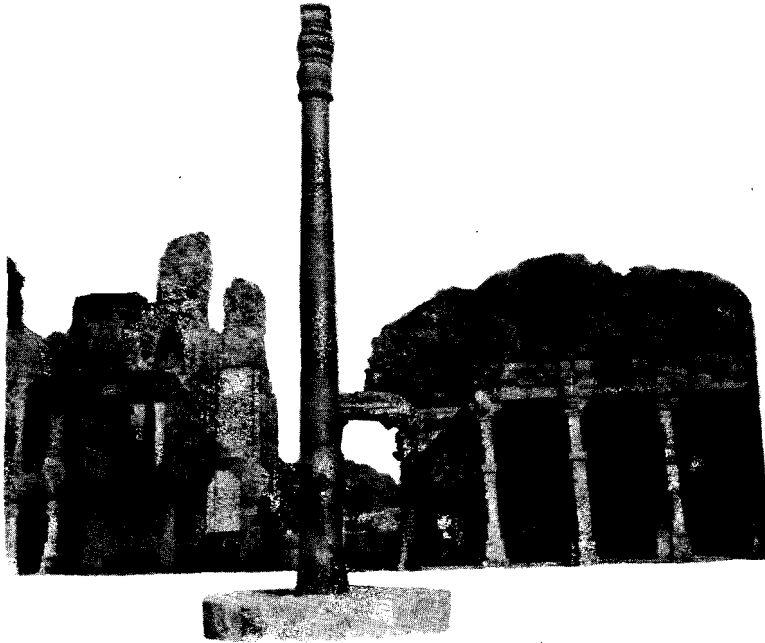
- We no longer find any Saka coins minted after this period, although Saka coins were being minted without a break for almost four hundred years previously.
- The Guptas, from the time of Chandragupta, started minting Saka-type silver coins—for this region. They only added their own distinct symbols on these coins; otherwise, the coins were like Saka coins in circulation till then. This definitely shows that the Saka areas came within the control of Chandragupta-II.
- The success of Chandragupta-II against the Sakas seems to have developed later on into the tradition of Sakari Vikramaditya, that is, of 'Vikramaditya, who was an enemy of the Sakas'.
- 'King Chandra' whose exploits have been mentioned in the Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription, which is located in the Qutab-Minar complex in Delhi is identified by many scholars with Chandragupta-II. According to this inscription Chandra crossed the Sindhu region of seven rivers and defeated Valhikas (identified with Bactria). Some scholars identify Chandragupta-II with the hero of Kalidasa's work **Raghuvamasa** because Raghu's exploits appear comparable with those of Chandragupta.
- The Mehrauli inscription also mentions Chandragupta's victory over enemies from Vanga (Bengal).

On the basis of these evidences it can be suggested that Chandragupta-II was able to extend the frontiers of the Gupta empire to western, north-western and eastern India.

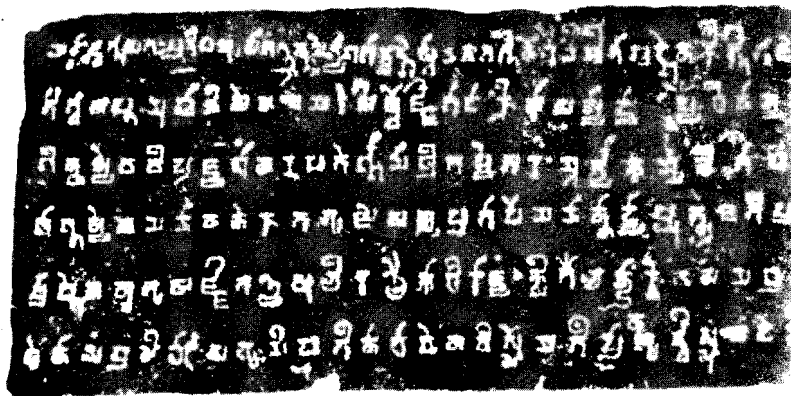
An important incident which took place during this period was the visit of Fa-Hien, a Chinese pilgrim, who came to India in search of Buddhist texts. In his memoirs he has given a vivid description of the places he visited and certain social and administrative aspects related to them. However, he does not mention the name of the King in his accounts. But he

speaks highly of the King of Madhya-desa, the region which was directly ruled by the Gupta monarch in this period, under whom the people were prosperous and happy.

Chandragupta-II is also known for his patronage to men of letters and he ruled till about 415-16 A.D.



2. The Mehrauli Iron Pillar



3. Inscription on Iron Pillar

32.5 KUMARAGUPTA-I

Chandragupta-II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta. We get information about him from certain inscriptions and coins.

For example:

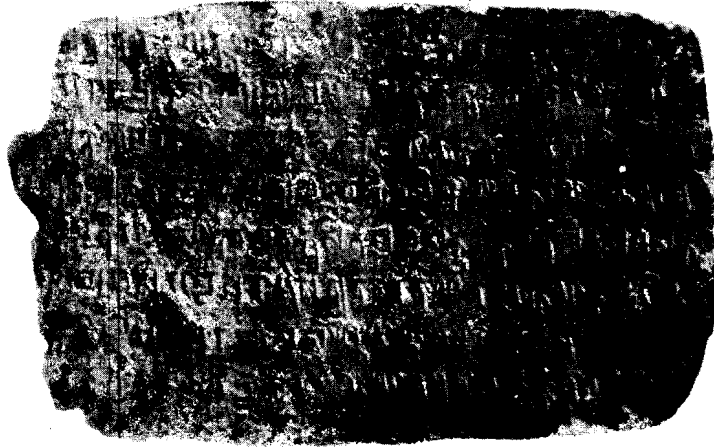
- The earliest known inscription of his period is from Bilsad (Etah district) which is dated 415 A.D. (Gupta Era 96).
- The Karamdanda (Fyzabad) inscription of Kumaragupta's minister (436 A.D.) mentions his fame having spread to the four oceans.
- A stone inscription from Mandsor (436 A.D.) mentions Kumaragupta as reigning over the whole earth.
- The Damodarpur Copper Plate inscriptions (433 A.D. and 447 A.D.) refer to him as **Maharajadhiraja** and show that he himself appointed the governor (**Uparika**) of

Pundravardhana **bhukti** (or province) being the biggest administrative division in the empire.

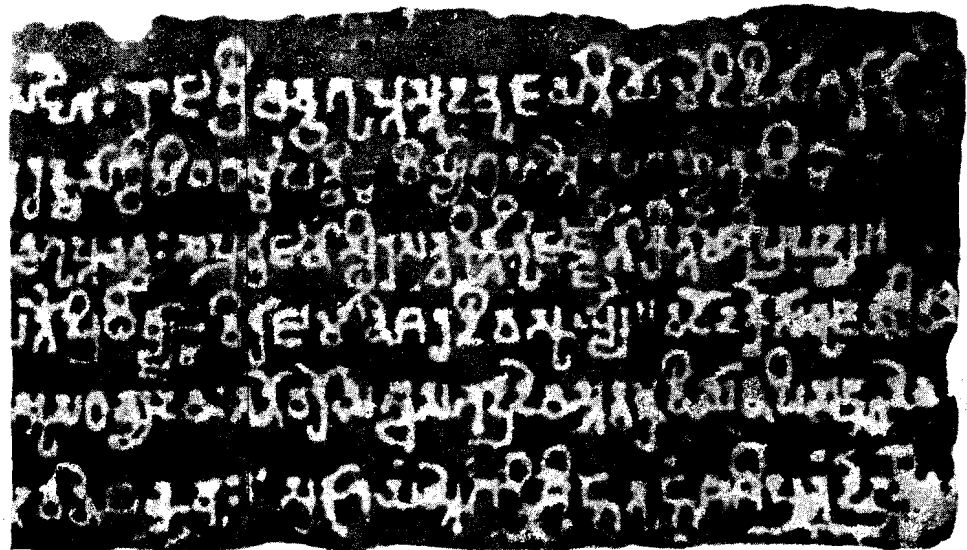
- The last known date of Kumaragupta is from a silver coin dated 455 A.D. (Gupta Era 136).

The wide area over which his inscriptions are distributed indicates that he ruled over Magadha and Bengal in the east and Gujarat in the west. It has been suggested that towards the last year of his reign the Gupta empire faced foreign invasion which was checked by the efforts of his son Skandagupta. He maintained cordial relationship with the Vakatakas which had been established through matrimonial alliances earlier.

4. Kumaragupta's Inscriptions.



a) Damodarpur



(b) Tuman

32.6 SKANDAGUPTA

Skandagupta, who succeeded Kumaragupta-I, was perhaps the last powerful Gupta monarch. To consolidate his position he had to fight the Pushyamitras, and the country faced Huna invasion from across the frontiers in the northwest. However, Skandagupta was successful in throwing the Huns back. It appears that these wars adversely affected the economy of the empire, and the gold coinage of Skandagupta bears testimony to that. In comparison to the gold coins of the earlier rulers the types of gold coins minted by Skandagupta were limited. In addition to following the earlier system of weights, he introduced a new, heavier weight system for gold coins but generally his coins had less gold in them than earlier coins.

Moreover, he appears to have been the last Gupta ruler to mint silver coins in western India. However, the Junagadh inscription of his reign tells us about the public works undertaken during his times. The Sudarsana lake (originally built during the Maurya times) burst due to excessive rains and in the early part of his rule his governor Parnadatta got it repaired. This indicates that the state undertook the task of public works. The last known date of Skandagupta is 467 A.D. from his silver coins.

Gupta Rulers after Skandagupta

It is not very clear in what order the successors of Skandagupta ruled. Skandagupta himself may not have been the rightful heir to the throne and therefore he had to fight other contenders to the throne. This may be the reason why a seal inscription traces a line of Gupta rulers after Skandagupta from Kumaragupta-I and his son Purugupta and not Skandagupta. Secondly, it is probable that the division of the Gupta empire into many parts already began towards the close of Skandagupta's reign. Thus an inscription from western Malwa, recorded in the last year of Skandagupta does not refer to him but to some other rulers beginning with Chandragupta-II.

Some of the successors of Skandagupta, mentioned in inscriptions, were: Budhagupta, Vainyagupta, Bhanagupta, Narasimhagupta Baladitya, Kumaragupta-II and Vismigupta. It is unlikely that all of them ruled over a vast empire, as Chandragupta-II and Kumaragupta-I had done in an earlier period. The Guptas continued to rule till about 550 A.D. but by then their power had already become very insignificant.

32.7 DISINTEGRATION OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

In this section we deal with some of the factors that contributed towards the disintegration of the Gupta empire.

1) Huna Invasions

From the time of Kumaragupta-I the north-west borders had been threatened by the Hunas a Central Asian tribe which was successfully moving in different directions and was establishing pockets of rule in northwestern, northern and western India. But their attacks were repulsed during that period. However, towards the end of the fifth century A.D. the Huna chief Tormana was able to establish his authority over large parts of western India and in central India. Mihirakula, his son, further extended the dominions. Thus, the Huna attacks caused a major blow to the Gupta authority particularly in northern and western regions of the empire.

2) Administrative Weaknesses

The policy adopted by the Guptas in the conquered areas was to restore the authority of local chiefs or kings once they had accepted Gupta suzerainty. In fact, no efforts were made to impose a strict and effective control over these regions. Hence it was natural that whenever there was a crisis of succession or a weak monarchy within the Gupta empire these local chiefs would reestablish their independent authority. This created a problem for almost every Gupta King who had to reinforce his authority. The constant military campaigns were a strain on the state treasury. Towards the end of the fifth century A.D. and beginning of sixth century A.D. taking advantage of the weak Gupta emperors, many regional powers reasserted their authority, and in due course declared their independence (You would read about these powers in Unit 34).

Besides these, there were many other reasons which contributed to the decline of Guptas. For example, it has been argued that the Guptas issued landgrants to the Brahmana donees and in this process surrendered the revenue and administrative rights in favour of the donees. Further, it is believed that the **Samanta** system in which the **Samantas** or minor rulers, who ruled as subordinates to the central authority, started to consolidate itself in the Gupta period. This is also believed to be the reason why Gupta administrative structure became so loose. There is diversity of opinion as to how the system originated and regarding the details of the system, but the presence of many **Samantas** within the empire does show that they wielded power almost independently of the Gupta authority.

There is no doubt that divisions within the imperial family, concentration of power in the hands of local chiefs or governors, loose administrative structure of the empire etc. contributed towards the disintegration of the Gupta empire.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss in about ten lines the military campaigns of Chandragupta-II.

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- 2) Discuss in about ten lines the factors which brought about the disintegration of Gupta empire.

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- 3) Which of the following statements are right or wrong?

- a) The Huna invasion during Kumaragupta's time was checked by Skandagupta.
- b) Fa-Hien came to India in search of Jaina texts.
- c) Ramagupta is said to be Chandragupta-II's elder brother.
- d) Sudarshan lake was repaired during Skandagupta's rule.

32.8 LET US SUM UP

In the beginning of the fourth century A.D. north India was divided into many small kingdoms and chiefdoms. These kingdoms in different regions often fought with each other. It was in such a political situation that the Gupta dynasty gained power and gradually established an empire. The kings of this dynasty undertook extensive military campaigns in different regions. It was under Samudragupta and Chandragupta-II that the imperial power was properly consolidated. The Guptas remained a strong force till the time of Skandagupta but after him the process of disintegration started. Various factors like foreign invasion, dissension within the ruling family, reassertion of power by local chiefs, administrative weakness, etc. hastened the process of disintegration.

32.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) Many b) Lichchhavis c) Samudragupta
- 2) Compare your answer by reading Sub-sec. 32.3.2
- 3) Yaudheyas, Malavas, Nagas, Madras, Later Kushanas. See Sub-sec. 32.2.1.

Check Your Progress 2

Rise and Growth of Guptas

- 1) Compare your answer with the contents in Sec. 32.4
- 2) See Sec. 32.8
- 3) a) $\checkmark$ b) $\times$ c) $\checkmark$ d) $\checkmark$

UNIT 33 ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND POLITY : GUPTAS

Structure

- 33.0 Objectives
- 33.1 Introduction
- 33.2 Administration under the Guptas
 - 33.2.1 King
 - 33.2.2 Council of Ministers and Other Officials
 - 33.2.3 Army
 - 33.2.4 Revenue Administration
 - 33.2.5 Provinces, Districts and Villages
- 33.3 Economy
 - 33.3.1 Agriculture
 - 33.3.2 Crafts Production and Trade
- 33.4 Society
- 33.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 33.6 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercises

33.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you shall be able to know about:

- the administrative set-up of the Guptas,
- the economic conditions under the Guptas in relation to agriculture, crafts production and trade, and
- the various aspects of social life during this period.

33.1 INTRODUCTION

After having made you familiar with an outline of the political history of the Gupta period (Unit 32) we now take up certain other aspects of this period. There are a variety of sources which tell us about economic, social, administrative and cultural aspects of this period. These sources of information are: (i) inscription written on different materials like copper plates, stone, clay seals; (ii) coins issued by rulers of different dynasties; (iii) material from excavations; (iv) contemporary literature; and (v) accounts left by foreign travellers like Fa-Hien.

In this Unit we shall tell you about the administrative set-up adopted by the Guptas. It will also deal with the economic activities of the period and with different sources of state revenue. The Unit also discusses the social conditions during this period.

33.2 ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE GUPTAS

We have already mentioned in Unit 32 that the Gupta kings did not interfere in the administration of those regions where the kings had accepted their suzerainty. However, this does not mean that the Guptas were ruling only through their feudatories. They had an elaborate administrative system which was in operation in areas which were directly controlled by them.

33.2.1 King

The King remained the central figure of administration. However, there was a considerable change in the character of monarchy. We find that the Gupta monarchs adopted high sounding titles like: **Paramabhattaraka**, **Parama-daivata**, **Chakravarti**, **Paramesvara**, etc. For example, the Allahabad **Prasasti** of Samudragupta describes him as "equal to the gods: Dhanada (Kubera), Varuna (Sea-God), Indra and Antaka (Vama), who had no

antagonist of equal power in the world....” Like the King who has been given a divine status in the **Smriti** scriptures, the Gupta monarchs too came to be considered a divinity on earth. However, in the spirit of **Smriti** literature and that of Kalidasa we find Skandagupta in his Bhitari Pillar inscription eulogized as a person who “subdued the earth and became merciful to the conquered people, but he became neither proud nor arrogant though his glory was increasing day by day.” His father, Kumaragupta, “followed the true path of religion”. Such references to the monarchy indicate that inspite of the supreme powers that vested in the King he was expected to follow a righteous path, and had certain duties:

- It was the King’s duty to decide the policy of the state during war and peace. For instance, Samudragupta was prudent enough to reinstate the monarchs of *dakshinapatha* in their original kingdoms.
- It was considered a prime duty of the monarch to protect his countrymen from any invasion.
- The King was to lead the army in case of war. This is demonstrated through the campaigns of Samudragupta and Chandragupta-II.
- The King was also expected to support the Brahmanas, Sramanas and all others who needed his protection.
- He was also supposed to venerate the learned and religious people and give them every possible help.
- As the supreme judge he looked after administration of justice according to religious percepts and existing customs.
- It was the duty of the King to appoint his central and provincial officers.
- The **Prayagprasasti** as well as the **Apratigha** type coins of Kumaragupta-I point to the appointment of successor to the throne by the reigning King.

An important political development of this period was the **continuity** of various kings in their regions once they had accepted the suzerainty of the Gupta King. And the Gupta King would not interfere with the administration of such regions.

33.2.2 Council of Ministers and Other Officials

The Gupta inscriptions are not very clear about the hierarchy of ministers. However, there is no doubt that the King used to take counsel of his ministers and issue written instructions to officials on all important matters.

The minister’s office was perhaps hereditary. For example, the Udayagiri inscription of the time of Chandragupta-II informs us that Virasena Saba, the minister for war and peace, was holding this office by inheritance. Though the supreme judicial powers were vested in the King, he was assisted by the **Mahanandanayaka** (Chief Justice). In the provinces this work was entrusted to the **Uparikas** and in districts to the **Vishayapatis**. In villages, the headman and the village elders used to decide the petty cases. The Chinese traveller Fa-Hien states that capital punishment was not given at all.

There were some other high officials. For example, the **Mahapratihara** was the chief of the palace guards, the **Pratihara** regulated ceremonies and granted the necessary permits for admission to the royal presence. There existed an espionage system as in the earlier period. The landgrant inscriptions often mention **Dutakas** who were associated with the task of implementing gifts when gifts of land were made to brahmanas and others.

33.2.3 Army

The Guptas must have had a big army organisation. At the time of war the King led his army but ordinarily there was a minister called ‘Sandhi-Vigrahika’ (Minister in charge of peace and war) who was helped by a group of high officials. The official title **Mahabaladhikrita** occurs in many inscriptions. Officials like **Pilupati** (head of elephants), **Asvapati** (head of horses), **Narapati** (head of footsoldiers) possibly worked under him. The army was paid in cash and its needs were well looked after by an officer-in-charge of stores called **Ranabhandagarika**. Amongst other duties this officer was to look after the supply of offensive and defensive weapons such as battle-axes, bows and arrows, spear pikes, swords, lances, javelins, etc.

33.2.4 Revenue Administration

Land revenue was the main source of the state's income besides the fines. In Samudragupta's time we hear of an officer **Gopasramin** working as **Akshapataladhikrita**. His duty was to enter numerous matters in the accounts registers, recover royal dues from the sureties of servants, to check embezzlement and recover fines for loss due to neglect or fraud.

Another prominent high official was **Pustapala** (record-keeper). It was his duty to make enquiries before recording any transaction. The Gupta kings maintained a regular department for the proper survey and measurement of land as well as for the collection of land revenue. Kamandaka in the **Nitisara** suggests that a King should take special care of his treasury, for the life of the state depends solely on it.

Both Kalidasa and the author of the **Narada-Smriti** state that one-sixth of the produce should be claimed as the royal revenue. Besides this there was the **Uparikara** which was levied on cloth, oil, etc. when taken from one city to another. The organization of traders had to pay a certain commercial tax (**Sulka**), the non-payment of which resulted in cancellation of the right to trade and a fine amounting to eight times of the original **Sulka**. The King had a right to forced labour (**Visthi**), **Bali** and many other types of contributions.. The King's income from royal lands and forests was considered as his personal income. Besides this, the King's treasury had a right to treasure troves (treasures in the forms of coin-hoards, jewels or other valuable objects, discovered from below the earth accidentally), digging of mines and manufacture of salt.

33.2.5 Provinces, Districts and Villages

The whole empire was divided into **Desas**, or **Rashtras**, or **Bhuktis**. The inscriptions provide us with the names of certain **Bhuktis**. In Bengal we hear of Pundravardhara **Bhukti** which corresponded to north Bengal. **Tira-bhukti** corresponded to north Bihar. The **Bhuktis** were governed by **Uparikas** directly appointed by the King. In areas like western Malwa we find local rulers like Bandhuvarman ruling as subordinate to Kumaragupta-I but Parnadatta was appointed a governor in Saurashtra by Skandagupta.

The Province or **Bhukti** was again divided into districts or **Vishayas** under an official called **Ayuktaka** and in other cases a **Vishyapati**. His appointment was made by the provincial governor. Gupta inscriptions from Bengal show that the office (**Adhikarana**) of the district-head associated with itself representation from major local communities: the **Nagarasresthi** (head of city merchants), **Sarthavaha** (Caravan-leader), **Prathama-Kulika** (head of the artisan community and **Prathama Kayastha** (head of the Kayastha community). Besides them, were the **Pustapalas**—officials whose work was to manage and keep records. The lowest unit of administration was the village. In villages where there was a headman called **Gramapati** or **Gramadhayaksha**.

However, the Gupta inscriptions from north Bengal show that there were other units higher than the village. In some cases we find references to **Astakuladhikarana**. Different categories of villages mentioned as **Gramikas**, **Kutumbis** and **Mahattaras** sent representatives to these offices which on various occasions functioned above the level of the village.

Besides agriculturists, there were certain other groups in the villages who followed such professions as carpentry, spinning and weaving, pot-making, oil extraction, gold smithery, and husbandry. All these groups must have constituted local institutions or bodies which looked after the affairs of the village. The village disputes were also settled by these (bodies) with the help of **Gramavridhas** or village elders.

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×)?
 - a) The King no more remained a central figure under the Guptas.
 - b) The King was to lead the army in case of war.
 - c) **Mahadandanayaka** was the minister of revenues.
 - d) One-sixth of the produce was claimed as royal revenue.
 - e) The highest unit of administration was the village.

- 2) Write in about five lines about the revenue administration of Guptas.

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- 3) Write in about ten lines the powers and duties of the King.

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33.3 ECONOMY

You have read earlier that agricultural crops constituted the main resources which the society produced and that the major part of the revenue of the state also came from agriculture. This of course does not mean that agriculture was the only occupation of the people or that people lived only in villages. There were other occupations like commerce and production of crafts which had become specialized occupations and in which different social groups were engaged. This also means that, as in earlier periods, people lived in forests, in agrarian tracts, in towns and in cities, but certain changes had started taking place in the pattern of economic production and consequently in relations between different social groups. We shall highlight some of these changes in the course of this and the next section.

33.3.1 Agriculture

Let us begin with the pattern of agricultural production. The concern of the society with agricultural production is clear from the way various aspects associated with agricultural operations are mentioned in the sources of the Gupta period. Various types of land are mentioned in the inscriptions; land under cultivation was usually called **Kshetra**. Lands not under cultivation were variously called as **Khila**, **Aprahata**, etc., and inscriptions give the impression that uncultivated land was being regularly brought under cultivation.

Classification of land according to soil, fertility and the use to which it was put was not unknown. Different land measures were known in different regions, although one cannot be certain what exact measure was denoted by a term. In some areas **Nivartana** was the term used for a measure of land whereas in the inscriptions of Bengal terms like **Kulyavapa** and **Dronavapa** are used. It is not possible to classify the regions precisely according to the crops grown, but all the major categories of crops—cereals like barley, wheat and paddy, different varieties of pulses, grams and vegetables as well as cash crops like cotton and sugarcane were known long before the Gupta period and continued to be cultivated. Of course, you should not assume that crops like maize or vegetables like potatoes or tomatoes were known to the farmers of the Gupta period.

The concern of the society with agricultural production is also reflected in the importance given to irrigation. In the earlier Blocks you have already read about the Sudarsana reservoir (**Tadaga**) in Saurashtra in Gujarat. Originally built in the Maurya period, this reservoir was thoroughly repaired when it was extensively damaged in the time of Mahakshatrapa

Rudradaman (middle of the second century A.D.). It was again severely damaged in the time of Skandagupta. Parnadatta, his newly appointed governor of Saurashtra and Parnadatta's son Chakrapalita, undertook the repair of the reservoir this time. Another method for irrigation was to draw water from wells and supply the water to the fields through carefully prepared channels. A mechanism, possibly known before the Gupta period, was to tie a number of pots to a chain; the chain with the pots reached down to the water of the well, and by making the chain and the pots rotate, it was ensured that the pots would continuously fill with water and empty it. This mechanism was known as **ghati-yantra** as **ghati** was the name used for a pot. This type of mechanism also came to be known as **araghatta**. In the **Harshacharita** of Banabhatta, which was of course written in the seventh century A.D. there is a very charming description of how cultivated fields, producing crops like sugarcane, were being irrigated with the help of **ghati-yantra**. In regions like Bengal, rainwater was collected in ponds and other types of reservoirs; in peninsular India, tank irrigation became gradually the norm. There were thus different systems of irrigation and the role of the state was only marginal in providing irrigation facilities to farmers. The farmers of course depended mainly on rainfall and the importance of rainfall is underlined not only in the **Arthashastra** of Kautilya but also in the texts written in the Gupta period.

The sources of the Gupta period suggest that certain important changes were taking place in the agrarian society. The inscriptions from Bengal refer to sale of land by district-level administration to individuals who bought them by paying cash and made gifts of purchased land to brahmanas who were expected to perform vedic sacrifices or to Buddhist or Jaina religious establishments. But land was not only purchased and gifted; the practice of gifting land to religious donees had become quite common by now. Even otherwise, remuneration for serving rulers in different capacities was received in the form of land by officials of different categories. Of course, all this was not absolutely new. But by now the number of ruling families had vastly increased and thus the number of persons who received land but did not cultivate themselves went on increasing. The virtues of giving land were highly praised and those who took away gifted land were threatened with many evil consequences. All this led to the appearance, in society, of a class of people who enjoyed superior rights over land and by virtue of these rights and by belonging to higher **varnas** had high economic and social status. Of course, landrights did not belong only to those who received land. The Gupta inscriptions refer to different types of village residents like **Gramikas**, **Kutumbis** and **Mahattaras** who must have been village landholders, and their participation in land transactions indicates that they too were important members of rural society.

Compared with the recipients of land from the rulers and the influential categories of landowners in villages, the condition of ordinary cultivators may be considered to have been rather bad. It is believed by some historians that because of the practice of land grants, the peasant population as a whole were reduced to a very low position in society. This is not entirely true. It was the ordinary cultivators, known by various terms such as **Krishibala**, **Karshaka** or **Kinass** who had low economic and social status. Among the actual cultivators there were those who filled the lands of others and received only a share of the produce. There were also slaves who worked on the fields of their masters. Even domestic female slaves were cruelly exploited, and a text like the **Kamasutra**, which was probably written in the Gupta period tells us how much hardship they had to go through at the hands of their masters.

There were other reasons why the condition of the ordinary cultivators declined considerably. One was that in many areas the appearance of small kingdoms of new rulers and their official and sections of people who did not take part in agriculture created great inequalities in society and imposed great burden on actual tillers of the soil. The number of taxes imposed by the state on the producers also increased in this period. Further, the practice of imposing **vishti** or unpaid labour was also in vogue, although we do not know for certain how much essential it was for agricultural production. All in all, the condition of the ordinary cultivators seems to have become worse than in the earlier periods.

33.3.2 Crafts Production and Trade

Crafts production covered a very wide range of items. There were items of ordinary domestic use like earthen pots, items of furniture, baskets, metal tools for domestic use and so on; simultaneously a wide variety of luxury items including jewellery made of gold, silver and precious stones; objects made of ivory; fine clothes of cotton and silk and other

costly items had to be made available to the affluent sections of people. Some of these items were made available through trade; others were manufactured locally. Descriptions of many luxury objects, of which no trace is generally found in archaeological excavations, may be found in the literary texts or inscriptions of the period. These sources also give us interesting hints regarding the status of different categories of craftsmen. For example, different varieties of silk cloth, called **Kshauma** and **Pattavastra** are mentioned in the texts of this period. An inscription of fifth century from Mandasor in western Malwa refers to a guild of silk-weavers who had migrated from south Gujarat and had settled in the Malwa region. Texts like **Amarakosha** and **Brihat Samhita** which are generally dated to this period, list many items, give their Sanskrit names and also mention different categories of craftsmen who manufactured them.

However, for an idea of the quantity and variety of objects manufactured in this period one has to go through reports of what have been found at various archaeological sites. Many important sites like Taxila, Ahichchhatra, Mathura, Rajghat, Kausambi and Pataliputra in the Ganges Valley and other sites in other geographical regions have yielded many craft products like earthen wares, terracottas, beads made of different stones, objects of glass, items made of metals, etc. It seems that in comparison with crafts production in the preceding Saka Kushana period, crafts production in the Gupta period suffered some setback. It has, however, not yet been possible to make a very satisfactory comparative study between these two periods from this angle.

All items were not available at all places; the movement of items for trade from one place to another, therefore, continued as in the earlier periods. You have read in Blocks VI and VII that India had extensive trade links with Central, West and Southeast Asia and with the Roman world in the preceding period, and trade routes connecting different regions within the country had been developing over centuries. That commercial activities continued in the Gupta period are evident. Like their Kushana predecessors the Gupta rulers too minted coins of different types, and the gold coins of the Gupta rulers show excellent qualities of craftsmanship. The Guptas also issued coins in copper, silver and lead. These coins were obviously used for purposes of commercial exchange and in some regions of the Gupta empire at least, the merchants held a high position in society. For example, two types of representatives of merchants—the **Nagarasresthi** and the **Sarthavaha**—were associated with the administration of the district headquarters in north Bengal. The seals of the Gupta period, found at Vaisali in north Bihar, suggest that the merchants constituted an important section of the population of the city of Vaisali. Literary texts of the period too show that in cities like Pataliputra and Ujjayini commercial activities were carried on briskly and people from different countries were present in them. Merchants were important communities also in these cities.

There were organizations which facilitated the functioning of both craftsmen and traders. The ancient term which was generally used for these organizations was **Sreni**, and the State was expected to provide the guilds protection and to respect their customs and norms. Similarly, members of the **Sreni** were also expected to follow the norms of the organization; otherwise, they were liable to punishment. The term **Sreni** is often interpreted as guild but there are different interpretations of the term and in terms of many details, we are still not quite sure what the **Srenis** were really like.

Although Crafts production and commercial activities were brisk in the Gupta period, there are two points we should especially remember:

- I) There were many types of craftsmen and they were not all identical either in wealth or in social status. For example, there was vast difference between a goldsmith and his family with a shop in a city like Ujjayini and a family of basketmakers in a village. This is reflected to some extent in the **Dharmasastras** written by the brahmanas in this period. The **Dharmasastras** assign different ranks to different groups of craftsmen, although in their scheme the craftsmen and artisans held a status lower than that of the brahmanas, kshatriyas and vaisyas. The **Dharmasastras** also suggest that each group of craftsmen formed a **jati** or caste. For example, the **Kumbhakaras** or potters formed one caste, the **Suvarnakaras** or goldsmiths formed another caste and so on. Although the system of caste was not really so simple, generally the trend among craftsmen was that persons following one craft formed a **jati** or a caste.
- II) Crafts production and commercial activities perhaps started declining from the Gupta

period onward in most regions and according to some historians, this resulted in the decline of towns and cities and in greater dependence of society of agricultural production. You will be reading more about these changes in Block 9.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Fill in the blanks:

- Land under cultivation was usually called (**Khila/Kshetra**).
- The practice of gifting land to religious donees (had become/was not at all) common during the fifth-sixth Century A.D.
- The ordinary cultivators (flourished/suffered) during this period.
- Sudarsana lake was repaired during the time of (**Skandagupta/Purugupta**).

2) Mention the methods adopted for irrigation during this period in about ten lines.

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3) Discuss in about five lines the sources which refer to crafts and craftsmen.

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33.4 SOCIETY

You have already read that according to the scheme of society conceived by the **brahmanas**, society was divided into four **varnas** (**Brahmana**, **Kshatriya**, **Vaisya** and **Sudra**), with each **varna** performing the set of functions prescribed for it and enjoying whatever rights were given to it. This was the ideal social order and the state was expected to preserve it. This means that when even a small state emerged in some corner of the country, the King of that state was expected to recognize this as the ideal social order. The **Brahmanas** came to exert considerable influence on the kings from the Gupta period and this is quite clear from the way they received land from the kings and others. The kings, officials and others gave land not only to individual **brahmanas** but also some times incited big groups of **brahmanas** to come and settle in remote areas. Thus, the number of **brahmana** settlements variously called **Brahmadiyas**, **Agraharas** and so on started increasing and they started spreading, among other things, the idea of a **varna**-divided social order.

However, **varna** order was an ideal order and there were many groups in society whose **varna** identity could never be determined. Secondly, it was assumed that the **varnas** would perform their duties; in reality, they may not have done so. These suggest that real society was different from the ideal society and this was also recognized by the **brahmana** writers of the **Dharmasastras**. They therefore tried to determine the status of various castes or **jatis** in society by giving fictitious explanations of their origins. They suggested that various **jatis** or groups originated through **varna-samkara** or inter-marriages between various **varnas**. The various foreign ruling families of the pre-Gupta period, of Greek or Sicythian origin,

were given the semi-kshatriya status (**vratya Kshatriya**) because they could not be considered to be of pure **Kshatriya** origin; similarly, fictitious origins were thought of for tribal groups who came to be absorbed into the Brahmanical society.

The **Dharmasastras** also speak of **apadharma** or conduct to be followed during periods of distress. This means that the **varnas** take to professions and duties not assigned to them when they found it necessary to do so. In matters of profession also the **Dharmasastras** thus recognized that the real society was different from their ideal society. These changes of course originated much before the Gupta period, but with the spread of the Brahmanas to different parts of India, the social structure came to be very complex. The new society had to absorb many social groups thus, the actual social structure came to vary from region to region, although certain ideas were common to them:

- The Brahmanas came to be recognized as the purest and therefore the highest **varna**. Since they were associated with Sanskrit learning and performed priestly functions, they came to be closely connected with royal power. Even when the rulers were supporters of Buddhism, Jainism or a particular religious sect, they continued to patronize brahmanas, particularly those of high learning. This remained one of the major reasons for the economic prosperity and prestige of the brahmanas.
- Ideally, although there were four **varnas**, these were various groups who were kept out of this scheme. They were the **antyajas** or untouchables. They were considered impure; even their touch was considered impure and their physical presence in areas where higher **varnas** lived and moved was not allowed. The **Chandalas**, the **Charmakaras** and similar groups were considered impure and outcasts. Thus, in the brahmanical order of society, the condition of a number of social groups remained miserable throughout.
- The position of woman of higher **varnas** was low. Although we hear of personalities like the Vakataka queen Prabhavatigupta who wielded considerable power, not all women were so privileged. The brahmana texts set down norms which women were expected to follow and women were expected, in the family, to function mainly as an ideal wife and ideal mother. In many Brahmana texts, women were even considered, for various reasons, to be of the same category as the Sudras. It is significant that although brahmanas were given landgrants regularly, we do not come across evidence of land being given to Brahmana women.

Another aspect of social life was that there existed great difference between the ways of life of the rich city-dwellers and people living in villages. The ideal city-dweller was the **nagaraka**, i.e. the urbanite who, because of his affluence, lived a life of pleasure and refined culture. There are interesting descriptions of this way of life not only in Vatsyayana's **Kamasutra** but also in other literary texts of the period. Of course, it would be wrong to presume that all classes of people who lived in cities could afford this way of life.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×) ?
 - a) The Brahmanas exerted considerable influence on kings from the Gupta period.
 - b) The real society, during the Gupta period, was different from the ideal society.
 - c) **Antyajas** were the highest in **varna** scheme.
 - d) The life of the city-dwellers and the villagers was the same.
- 2) Discuss the changes in the **varna** system in about ten lines.

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33.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, after going through the various aspects of Gupta administration, economy and society we find that considerable changes had taken place when compared to the earlier periods. An important aspect related to kingship was the continuity of various kings in their regions once they had accepted the suzerainty of the Gupta King. There was considerable concern towards agricultural production and this is reflected from the way irrigation got priority during this period. The practice of gifting land to religious donees had become quite common and the brahmanas exerted considerable influence over the King. There was differentiation amongst the cultivators and compared to the rich, the condition of ordinary cultivators declined considerably. Similarly, the wealth and social status of different types of craftsmen also varied. Though commercial activities continued during this period it appears that there was a decline in crafts production. The **varna** system continued in society. However, various foreign ruling families were assimilated in the **varna** system. At the same time various groups were kept out of the **varna** scheme and were considered untouchables. There was also a considerable decline in the position of women in society.

33.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) (a) × (b) √ (c) × (d) √ (e) ×
- 2) See Sub-sec. 33.2.4
- 3) Base your answer on Sub-sec. 33.2.1

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) (a) **Kshetra** (b) had become; (c) suffered (d) Skandagupta.
- 2) Base your answer on Sub-sec. 33.3.1
- 3) Check your answer by comparing with the first two paragraphs of Sub-sec. 33.3.2

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) (a) √ (b) √ (c) × (d) ×
- 2) Check your answer by reading Sec. 33.4

UNIT 34 POST-GUPTA KINGDOMS IN NORTH INDIA

Structure

- 34.0 Objectives
- 34.1 Introduction
- 34.2 The Regional Powers
 - 34.2.1 Yasodharman
 - 34.2.2 The Maukharis
 - 34.2.3 The Later Guptas
- 34.3 The Pushyabhuties of Thaneshwar and Kanauj
- 34.4 Harshavardhana
- 34.5 Political condition of North India in Post-Harsha Period
- 34.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 34.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

34.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you would be able to:

- learn about the political changes that took place after the disintegration of the Gupta empire,
- know about the emergence of various political powers which were gradually gaining importance,
- discuss the origin and growth of the power of the Pushyabhuties of Thaneshwar and Kanauj,
- know about some of the events during the reign of King Harsha,
- learn about the administrative system of Harsha, and
- know about the political condition of north India after Harsha's death.

34.1 INTRODUCTION

In the sixth century A.D. the disintegration of the Gupta empire gradually paved way for the growth of many smaller kingdoms. In certain regions new kingdoms emerged and in other areas the dynasties which had earlier accepted Gupta suzerainty now declared their independence. For example, kings like Yasodharma and political powers like the Maukharis, the Hunas and the later Magadhan Guptas were the new powers. Besides these the Pushyabhuties, the Gaudas, the Varmans and the Maitrakas also grew in importance. This Unit attempts to give a brief sketch of the political history of these kingdoms. It also takes into account certain other aspects like the nature of the administrative system under Harshavardhana of the Pushyabhuti family, political patronage to Buddhism, etc.

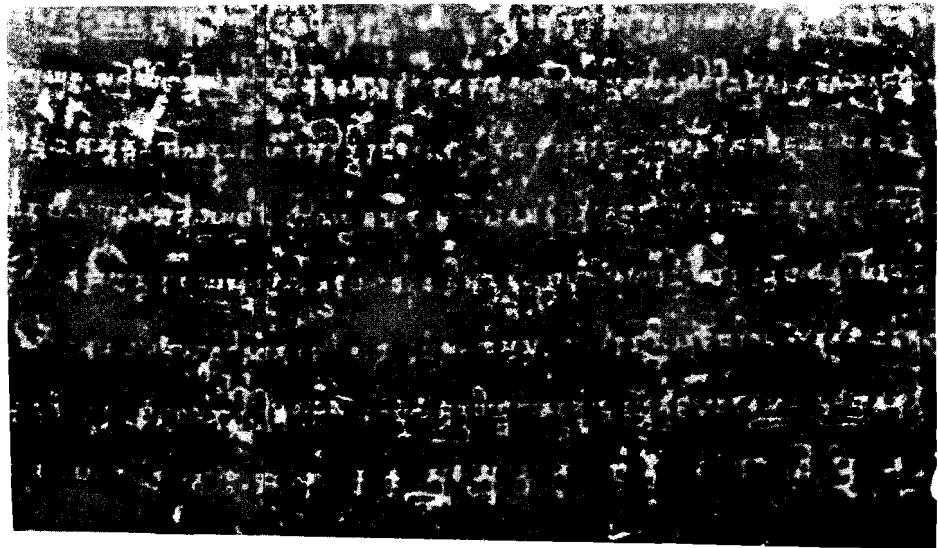
34.2 THE REGIONAL POWERS

In the absence of a strong power there emerged quite a number of regional powers in different regions. These powers, representing different dynasties, established their kingdoms and were often at war with each other. Here we briefly mention some of these powers:

34.2.1 Yasodharman

During the reign of Kumaragupta-I his feudatory Bandhuvvarman ruled over Mandasor as it was a major Centre of western Malwa. He belonged to the Aulikara family which perhaps ruled there up to the beginning of the sixth century A.D. Two stone pillar inscriptions from Mandasor in Madhya Pradesh, one of which is dated in 532 A.D., refer to a powerful king Yasodharman. One of these inscriptions reports the victories of Yasodharman. The inscription describes him as the victor of all those lands which had not been subdued even

by the Guptas. But the names of the defeated powers have not been mentioned except that of Mihirkula. It appears that Yasodharman rose to power in about 528 A.D. and continued to rule till 532 A.D., (the date of Mandasor inscription) but by 543 A.D. his power must have been eclipsed.



5. Yasodharman's Mandasor Inscription

34.2.2 The Maukharis

The Maukharis were an old family as we find references to them in Patanjali's work and in other early documents.

The Maukharis must have started gaining political power towards the end of 5th century A.D. as the Harsha inscription of 554 A.D. mentions the rise of Yajnavarman from Gaya during this period

We also get the names of three Maukhari kings mentioned in the Barabar and Nagarjuni inscriptions who ruled in Gaya, about 150 years earlier than their successors at Kanauj.

The first three Maukhari kings are Yagnavarman, Sardulavarman and Anantavarman. Some of these kings held simply the title of **Samanta** which indicates that they were acting as kings under the over-lordship of the Guptas.

From the Asirgarh Copper seal we get the names of (1) Harivarman, (2) Adityavarman, (3) Isvaravarman, (4) Isanavarman, (5) Sarvavarman, who had ruled over Kanauj in U.P. The first three kings had the title of **Maharaja** whereas Isanavarman is called **Maharajadhiraja**.

It was perhaps Isanavarman who set up an independent kingdom. The early Maukhari kings had established family ties with the later Guptas. However, Isanavarman's declaration of his independence must have spoilt the relations between the later Guptas and the Maukharis for the Apshad inscription tells us of the victory of Kumaragupta the fourth king of the Later Gupta family of Magdha, over Isanavarman. But the dynasty seems to have continued its rule.

Sarvavarman, the second son of Isanavarman, was successful in retrieving the lost prestige of the Maukharis by defeating Damodaragupta of the Later Gupta dynasty. The last of the Maukhari kings was Grahavarman who was married to Rajyasri, the daughter of Prabhakaravardhan of Thaneshwar and sister of the famous ruler Harshavardhana. The Malava king Devagupta attacked Kanauj and killed Grahavarman bringing the Maukhari kingdom to an end. The Maukharis held sway over modern U.P. and parts of Magadha. However, the innumerable wars which they lost and won kept changing their boundaries.

34.2.3 The Later Guptas

From around the middle of sixth century A.D. till about 675 A.D. the kings who ruled Magadha were known as Magadha Guptas or Later Guptas. However, it is not clear what connection they had with the Imperial Guptas of the earlier period.

The Apsad inscription from Gaya gives the names of 8 Gupta Monarchs:

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|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| (1) Krishnagupta | (2) Harshagupta | (3) Jivitagupta |
| (4) Kumaragupta | (5) Damodaragupta | (6) Mahasenagupta, |
| (7) Madhavagupta and | (8) Adityasena. | |

The Later Guptas entered into matrimonial alliances with other contemporary ruling families. For example, Harshagupta married his sister to a Maukhari king. Throughout this period the Later Guptas remained engaged in battle with one enemy or the other. For example, Harshagupta had to fight the Hunas; his son Jivitagupta fought against Lichchhavis of Nepal and Gaudas of Bengal; and Jivitagupta's successor king Kumaragupta defeated Maukhari King Isanarvarman.

The next king Damodaragupta, son of Kumaragupta, was defeated and killed by Maukhari king Sarvavarman and lost a portion of Magadha. For some time the successors of Damodaragupta retreated to Malwa because of the Maukharis but they again established their supremacy in Magadha.

Their most powerful ruler was Adityasena, who ruled in Magadha in 672 A.D., a date which seems to occur in one of his inscriptions. The Later Gupta power survived the empire of Harshavardhana and Adityasena signalled his accession to power by the performance of a horse sacrifice. According to the Apsad inscription, his empire included Magadha, Anga and Bengal. It is just possible that his kingdom included a portion of eastern Uttar Pradesh. He was a **Parama-Bhagavata** and got a temple of Vishnu constructed.

The Later Gupta line came to an end with the expansion of the power of the Gaudas of Bengal westward. But the Gaudas themselves were subdued by Yasovarman of Kanauj.

Besides the abovementioned dynastic powers the other important states that emerged in the post-Gupta period were those of the:

- Maitras of Valabhi in Gujarat
- Gurjaras in Rajputana and Gujarat
- Gaudas in Bengal
- Varmans in Kamrup (Assam)
- Mana and Sailodbhava families in Orissa.

The Maitraka kings of Valabhi had initially been under the overlordship of the Imperial Guptas and they gradually established their own supremacy. The founder of the Gurjara kingdom was Harichandra whose three successors ruled till about 640 A.D. Gauda, the region of north and north-west of Bengal was ruled by Sasanka, a contemporary and arch-rival of Harshavardhana, as an independent kingdom in the early seventh century A.D. The **Prayagaprasasti** recording the achievements of the Gupta ruler Samudragupta refers to two kingdoms in Assam : Kamarupa and Davaka. Kamarupa became an important political region in north-eastern India from the middle of the fourth century A.D. Pushyavarman probably founded, around this date, the first historical royal family of Assam. This family ruled for twelve generations till the time of Bhaskaravarman who was a contemporary and an ally of Harshavardhana of Kanauj and ruled in the first half of the seventh century A.D.

Although there is evidence that some local rulers of Orissa owed allegiance to Imperial Gupta rulers towards the end of Gupta rule, two autonomous kingdoms emerged in Orissa in the second half of the sixth century A.D. One was the Mana kingdom which extended from Balasore to Puri district and the other was the kingdom of the Sailodbhavas of Kongoda, which extended from Chilka lake to Mahendragiri mountains in Ganjam district. Both kingdoms suffered setbacks because of the rise of Sasanka of Bengal and Harshavardhana of Kanauj.

Check Your Progress I

- 1) List the main minor powers and the regions they ruled in north India in the sixth century A.D.

- 2) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×).
- The stone pillars inscriptions from Mandasor refer to the reign of Kumaragupta-I.
 - Maukhari kings ruled over Gaya.
 - The most powerful Maukhari king was Adityavarman.
 - It is clear that the later Gupta's had links with the imperial Guptas.

34.3 THE PUSHYABHUTIS OF THANESHWAR AND KANAUJ

A variety of sources inform us about the rise of the family of Pushyabhutis which first ruled from Thaneshwar in Haryana and later from Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh. These sources include the text **Harshacharita** of Banabhatta, accounts of Hiuen-tsang and some inscriptions and coins etc. Banabhatta informs us that the founder king of this dynasty at Thaneshwar was Pushyabhuti and that the family was known as Pushyabhuti **vamsa**. However, the inscriptions of Harsha make no reference to him. The Banskhera and Madhuvan plates and royal seals mention five earlier rulers among whom the first three are given the title of **Maharaja**. This may indicate that they were not sovereign monarchs. The fourth king Prabhakarvardhana has been described as a **Maharajadhiraja** which makes us infer that he was an independent monarch and had established matrimonial relations with the Maukharis by marrying his daughter Rajyasri with Grahavarman.

Thaneshwar, during this time (about 604 A.D.) was threatened by the Hunas from the western side. Banabhatta has described Prabhakarvardhana as "a lion to the Huna deer". According to him an army under Rajyavardhana was sent to defeat the Hunas but due to the sudden illness of his father he had to come back. With Prabhakarvardhana's death the family had to face troubled times for a while. The Malava king killed Grahavarman and took Rajyasri prisoner. It appears that the Malava and the Gauda kings entered into alliance and even Thaneshwar was threatened. Rajyavardhana defeated the Malavas but was killed through treachery by Sasanka, the Gauda king. Now it was Harsha's responsibility to seek revenge and in due course he was able to establish a strong empire.

34.4 HARSHAVARDHANA

Harsha ascended the throne of Thaneshwar around 606 A.D. and immediately marched against the Gaudas. He also entered into an alliance with Bhaskarvarman—the king of Pragjyaotisha (Assam) as both had a common enemy in Sasanka, the king of Gauda (Bengal). We have no information whether Harsha entered into battle with Sasanka but he was able to save his sister Rajyasri and the kingdoms of Thaneshwar and Kanauj were combined with Harsha now ruling from Kanauj. In fact Hiuen-tsang's account mentions him and his predecessors as rulers of Kanauj. Both Bana and Hiuen-tsang refer to Harsha's vow of defeating other kings. Subsequently, he fought the rulers of Valabhi and Gurjaras in the west; Chalukyas in the Deccan; and Magadha and Gauda in the east:

- The Maitrakas of Valabhi had emerged as a strong power in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Valabhi is generally identified with Wala, 18 miles from Bhavnagar in Kathiawar. We find the names of five Valabhi kings who were contemporaries of Harsha. Hiuen-tsang has mentioned the Valabhi king Dhruvasena II Baladitya as Harsha's son-in-law who also attended the religious assembly called by Harsha at Prayaga. This indicates that Harsha's hostilities with Valabhis ended through a matrimonial alliance. However, through the inscriptions of Gurjara kings we know that their king Dadda II, had supported the Valabhis. The Valabhis remained a strong power during the reign of Harsha.
- From Bana's account we know that the Gurjaras were hostile to the Vardhanas. A family of Gurjara rulers was ruling at Nandipuri in the Broach region of Gujarat in this

period. This might have continued during the period of Harsha. It appears that the Gurjaras accepted the suzerainty of Chalukyas of Badami in Karnataka as a safeguard against Harsha, for the Aihole inscription mentions Lata, Malava and Gurjara as feudatories of Pulakasin II, the Chalukya ruler.

- An eulogy or **prasasti** of Pulakasin II, placed on a temple wall at Aihole, also mentions Pulakesin's military success against Harshavardhana.
- Hiuen-tsang's account mentions that inspite of his victories over many kingdoms he was not able to defeat Pulakasin II, the Chalukya ruler of Badami in Karnataka. We have no details of the battle and where it was fought but this is clear that Harsha could not achieve success against Pulakesin II.
- Harsha was successful in his eastern campaigns. A Chinese account mentions him as the king of Magadha in 641 A.D., we have already mentioned his alliance with Bhaskaravarman the king of Assam and it is possible that they jointly conducted campaigns in Bengal and other parts of eastern India.
- Harsha had diplomatic relations with the Chinese for his contemporary T'ang emperor sent three embassies to his court. The last of these, under Wang-hiuen-tse, arrived in India in 647 A.D. when Harsha was no longer alive. Harsha himself had sent a brahmana envoy to China in 641 A.D. Harsha ruled for a period of 41 years and is said to have died about 647 A.D. The administrative set-up under Harsha was in some ways a continuation of the system prevalent under the Guptas. Hiuen-tsang mentions that Harsha used to take up tours throughout his kingdom. The king remained the supreme authority, assisted by his ministers and other officials of different categories.

For example, the Madhuban copper plate mentions the names of various officials like uparika (provincial governor), **Senapati** (Army chief), **Dutaka** (informer), etc. However, his inscriptions, Bana's **Harshacharita** and Hiuen-tsang's account leave no doubt that the stability of the administration and of the empire had come to depend much on the support of allies and feudatories (**samantas** and **mahasamantas**). The officials, it appears, were not paid salaries in cash. Instead, they were given land as payment for their services. The law and order situation seems to have slackened during this period as Hiuen-tsang himself had to face plunder by dacoits.

The Banskhera, Nalanda and Sonepat Inscriptions of Harsha describe him as a worshipper of Siva. However, later on he became a Buddhist and convened a conference at Kanauj. Here the doctrines of Mahayana were propagated with utmost precision. This assembly, according to Hiuen-tsang, was attended by eighteen kings and three thousand monks and continued for eighteen days. Another such event during Harsha's reign was the Quinquennial distribution ceremony at Prayaga. Harsha performed five such ceremonies in his last thirty years. He used to distribute all the treasures accumulated during the last five years in these ceremonies.

Learning and education got royal patronage during this period. Nalanda university had more than ten thousand students. Harsha had given hundred villages in donation to this University.

34.5 POLITICAL CONDITION OF NORTH INDIA IN POST-HARSHA PERIOD

The empire built up by Harshavardhana had a very loose structure; after his death even this structure collapsed.

The events immediately following the death of Harsha have been described at some length by Wang-Hiuen-tse who had been deputed as an ambassador by the Chinese emperor. But as he reached the borders of India, the news of Harsha's death reached him. He tells us that Arjuna (Ti-no-fo-ti) sent an army to check the entry of the Chinese ambassador. Somehow Wang-Hiuen-tse escaped and came back to fight Arjuna with an army of one thousand from Tibet and seven thousand from Nepal. Arjuna and his army were defeated and captured. Later the queen of Arjuna continued the fight but was defeated. Wang took Arjuna to China and presented him to his King. However, the authenticity of this account is doubted by certain scholars.

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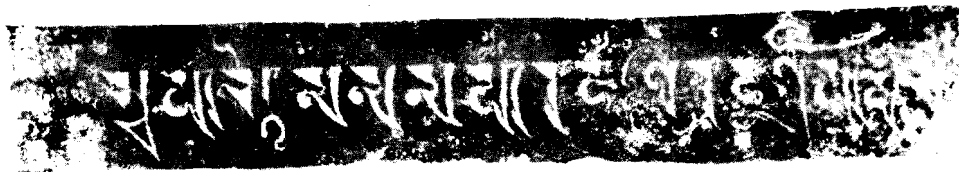
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6. Harsha's signatures on Banskhera Plate



7. Nalanda seal of Harsha



8. Gold coin of Harsha

Post-Harsha Dynasties

Among the post-Harsha rulers the Nidhanapur inscription of King Bhaskaravarman mentions about his rule in Karnasuvarna in the Murshidabad district of Bengal and nearby places. Similarly, the Apsad inscription mentions Adityasena's rule over Magadha.

In Kashmir Durlabhavardhan established a dynasty known as Karakota. His grandson Chandrapida checked the entry of the Arabs in Kashmir. Another king of this dynasty, Lalitaditya Muktapida, attacked Kanauj and defeated Yasovarman. It appears from Chinese accounts that Muktapida did not annex the kingdom but entered into an alliance with him.

After about 75 years of Harsha's death Yasovarman rose to power in Kanauj. He defeated the Gaudas and also won Magadha. Yasovarman, besides being a great warrior, was a great patron of scholars. His court was graced by Vakapati and Bhavabhuti. Vakapati wrote **Gaudavaho** in Prakrit, while Bhavabhuti wrote **Malatimadhava**, **Mahaviracharita** and **Uttara-Ramacharita** in Sanskrit.

Although the rule of many of these royal families lasted only for a short period, we should remember that in many regions of the Indian subcontinent this period saw the beginnings of stable state structures. These were not all-india empires, but they represented the beginnings of regional political structures. We have already referred to the Kashmir valley where, inspite of many dynastic changes, we find for the first time the functioning of a local state system. In Bengal, the emergence of Pala power from the middle of the eighth century A.D. and its duration for several centuries marked a new phase in the political history of the region. Similarly, in Western India, covering both Rajasthan and Gujarat, emerged many

new ruling families like the Gurjara Pratiharas, Guhilas, the Chahamanas and others who came to be considered as different clans of the Rajputs who dominated the political scene of western India for centuries. Thus, the decline of Gupta power and the collapse of Harsha's empire did not mean beginnings of political anarchy. After the end of these empires, the regional powers consolidated themselves and played important roles in the history of subsequent periods.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (x)?
 - a) Hiuen-tsang was an Arab traveller
 - b) The Maitrakas of Valabhi were a strong power in the Saurashtra region
 - c) Harsha defeated Pulakesin II
 - d) Harsha did not convene a Buddhist conference
 - e) The authenticity of Wang-Hiuen-tse's account is doubted by certain scholars
- 2) Write in about ten lines the relation of Harsha with other powers.

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- 3) What was the political condition in north India in the post-Harsha period? Answer in about ten lines.

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34.6 LET US SUM UP

In the post-Gupta period many kingdoms came into existence. These kingdoms were not as large as the Gupta kingdom. The political fortunes of the dynasties which ruled these kingdoms fluctuated with time. Some of the powerful kings like Harsha managed to bring almost the whole of northern India under their control, but their kingdoms were short-lived. However, simultaneously we find that in many regions new political powers emerged which lasted for many centuries. The beginnings of many regional states can be traced to this period. Although the rule of many of these royal families lasted only for a short period, we should remember that in many regions of the India subcontinent, this period saw the beginnings of stable state structures. These were not all-India empires, but they represented the beginnings of regional political structures. We have already referred to the Kashmir

valley where, inspite of many dynastic changes, we find for the first time the functioning of a local state system. In Bengal, the emergence of Pala power from the middle of the eighth century and its duration for several centuries marked a new phase in the political history of the region. Similarly, in Western India, covering both Rajasthan and Gujarat, emerged many new ruling families like the Gurjara-Pratiharas, Guhilas, the Chahamanas and others who came to be considered as different class of the Rajputs who dominated the political scene of Western India for centuries. Thus, the decline of Gupta power and the collapse of Harsha's empire did not mean beginnings of political anarchy. After the end of these empires, the regional powers consolidated themselves and played important roles in the history of subsequent periods.

34.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Base your answer on Sec. 34.2
- 2) a) × b) ✓ c) × d) ×

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) a) × B) ✓ c) × d) × e) ✓
- 2) See Sec. 34.4
- 3) Compare your answer with the contents in Sec. 34.5

UNIT 35 KINGDOMS IN THE DECCAN AND SOUTH INDIA

Structure

- 35.0 Objectives
- 35.1 Introduction
- 35.2 Political Situation in the Deccan till the Mid-sixth Century A.D.
 - 35.2.1 Vidarbha (Maharashtra)
 - 35.2.2 Karnataka
 - 35.2.3 Eastern Deccan
 - 35.2.4 South Karnataka
- 35.3 Political Situation in South India
- 35.4 The Rise of the Chalukyas, the Pallavas and the Pandyas
 - 35.4.1 The Chalukyas
 - 35.4.2 The Pallavas
 - 35.4.3 The Pandyas
 - 35.4.4 Other Powers
- 35.5 Conflicts Between Different Powers
 - 35.5.1 The Role of Minor Kings
 - 35.5.2 Other Dimensions of Political Conflicts
 - 35.5.3 Relations with other Countries
 - 35.5.4 Kerala
- 35.6 Political Organisation
 - 35.6.1 The King and the Higher Stratum of Administration.
 - 35.6.2 Administrative Units
 - 35.6.3 Local Associations
- 35.7 Relations Between Different Categories of Rulers
- 35.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 35.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

35.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to learn about:

- the kingdoms that arose in the Deccan and South India with special reference to the Chalukyas of Badami and the Pallavas of Kanchi,
- the relations between these kingdoms,
- the role of geography in understanding the political history of our period, and
- how people were governed in these kingdoms.

35.1 INTRODUCTION

People often speak of India south of the Vindhyas as South India or the Deccan. This division has been made for a long time, indeed as early as ancient India when the area south of the Vindhyas was called **Dakshinapatha** or the Southern Territory. **Dakhina** became the **Dakkan** of medieval times, from which in turn the term Deccan is derived. But historians and geographers have found it more useful to distinguish the Deccan proper from the rest of south India. The Deccan consists of Maharashtra and northern Karnataka, and as far as the double deltas of the Godavari and the Krishna. Following this usage, we shall speak of the Deccan and south India as the two regions south of the Vindhyas while the term 'southern India' will stand for both the regions and as distinct from 'northern India.' You will appreciate the value of these distinctions more and more as you go deeper into the study of the history and society of this area.

In Block-7 you have read about the political development which took place in the Deccan and south India in the Mauryan and post-Mauryan period. You have noticed that while the Deccan was included in the Mauryan empire, the major chiefdoms of south India, i.e. those of the Cholas, Pandyas, Cheras and Satyaputras were friendly neighbours of the Mauryas. In the post-Mauryan period, initially minor chiefs assuming the title of **raja** or King

appeared in the Deccan and the Deccan was politically integrated by the Satavahanas who called themselves 'Lords of the Deccan'. In the south, too, the chiefdoms were going through important changes resulting in the emergence of State systems in the subsequent period. In this Unit you shall be reading about the political situation which developed in the Deccan from the post-Satavahana period (beginning of the third century A.D.) to the eighth century A.D.

35.2 POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE DECCAN TILL THE MID-SIXTH CENTURY A.D.

After the decline of the Satavahanas the political control of the Deccan under one dynasty came to an end. A number of kingdoms arose in different regions as successors of the Satavahanas. In northern Maharashtra we see the Abhiras, who for a time served as army commanders in the Saka kingdoms, founding a kingdom in mid-third century A.D. The founder of this line was one Isvarasena, who began an era in A.D. 248-49. This era became very important later and came to be known as Kalachuri-Chedi Era.

35.2.1 Vidarbha (Maharashtra)

The Maharashtra plateau soon came to be dominated by the Vakatakas. They began as minor kings from the last quarter of the third century A.D., but rapidly gained in power and extended their sway over most of Maharashtra and adjoining parts of Madhya Pradesh. There were two lines of Vakataka kings ruling in different areas. The main line ruled from eastern Maharashtra (the Vidarbha region) while a collateral branch, called the Basin branch of the Vakatakas, ruled in southern Maharashtra. The most famous Vakataka King was Pravarasena-I of the main line, who alone had the title of **Samrat** among the Vakatakas. He performed several Vedic sacrifices and issued a large number of landgrants to brahmanas. The Vakatakas seem to have been peace-loving people on the whole and had formed matrimonial and diplomatic ties with their powerful neighbours such as the Guptas in the north, the Vishnukundins in eastern Deccan and the Kadambas in the south. But the break-up and weakening of the kingdom could not be prevented as the Kalachuris and the Kadambas carved out their territories at its cost in the first-half of the sixth century A.D. By the mid-sixth century they were supplanted by the Chalukyas of Badami as the major power in the Deccan.

35.2.2 Karnataka

In the coastal strip of northern Karnataka (North Kanara) and adjoining areas a small kingdom was carved out by the Chutus. They ruled till about the mid-fourth century A.D. when they were supplanted by the Kadambas. This kingdom was founded by the famous Mayurasarman, who was an expert in guerrilla warfare and compelled the Pallavas of Kanchi to recognize his sovereignty. He then performed horse sacrifices (**asvamedha**) and became Mayuravarman from Mayurasarman, that is, a kshatriya from a brahmana (Varman was a typical kshatriya surname while '**sarman**' was a brahmana surname). Early in its history there was a division of the Kadamba kingdom into two parts between the two lines of the family, with Vijayanti (Banavasi) and Palasika (Halsi) as the capitals. The two lines were never in peace with each other, and both were threatened by their more powerful neighbours—the Pallavas, the Western Gangas, and, above all, the Chalukyas of Badami. The Chalukyas gradually ate into their territory, and by about 575 A.D. completely vanquished them.

35.2.3 Eastern Deccan

Politically the most disturbed region in the post-Satavahana Deccan was the fertile Krishna-Godavari delta (Andhra delta) in the east. Here the Satavahanas were succeeded by the Ikshvakus who were in control of this region from 225 A.D. There was a break in their rule by the coming of Abhiras from the west, but it was a brief interregnum, and the Ikshvakus came back and ruled for the next fifty years or so. Then the area was apparently split up into a number of principalities. From copper-plate inscriptions we come to know of the kings of Brihatphalayana gotra followed by those of Salankayana gotra, while the Allahabad Pillar Inscription or the Prayagprasasti (See Block 8, Unit 32) which praises Samudragupta,

informs us about half a dozen kingdoms in this area about 350 A.D. These included kingdoms of Vengi; of Kurla, with capitals at Pishtapura and at Avamukta of Devarashtra, and so on.

Political stability returned to the Andhra delta from the mid-fifth century with the coming of the Vishnukundins. They had good relations with the Vaktakas, but had prolonged, continued conflicts with the Western Gangas of south Karnataka. Madhavarman-I (440-60 A.D.), the founder of the line who performed many horse sacrifices, and Madhavavarman-II (556-616 A.D.) are among the famous rulers of the line. The Vishnukundins ruled till about the first quarter of the seventh century A.D. when the Chalukyas came in.

35.2.4 South Karnataka

In south Karnataka there arose a dynasty at the beginning of the fifth century A.D. The kings of this dynasty are called Gangas or Western Gangas to distinguish them from the Eastern Ganges of Orissa. The Western Gangas ruled over south Karnataka for the next six hundred years: because of such a long association the area came to be called Gangavadi. Gangavadi is an isolated territory surrounded by mountains and is relatively less prosperous agriculturally. Both these factors allowed the Gangas to rule without much interference from outsiders for such a long time. They were, however, very advantageously situated from a military point of view. They were to play a very important role in the mutual conflicts between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas of Badami mostly as subordinate allies of the latter, as well as in the conflict between the Pallavas and the Pandyas. They did not generally have cordial relations with the Pallavas, who they were well placed to harass from their lofty mountain fortress of Nandidrug.

35.3 POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH INDIA

The Sangam period in Tamilnadu and Kerala drew to a close about the end of the third century A.D. The history of this area from the fourth to the mid-sixth century A.D. is very obscure. The early history of the Pallavas belongs to this period. We have their copper-plate charters that were issued from Kanchi. Pallava rule was traditionally associated with the Kanchi region (Palar river valley) or Tondaimandalam (**tondai** is Tamil for **Pallava**). But it seems that during this period the Kanchi region was not under their effective control as they had been pushed north by mountainous tribes called Kalabhras

In fact, from the end of the Sangam period to the mid-sixth century A.D., Tamilnadu and Kerala were dominated by the Kalabhras. We do not know much about them, but it has been inferred from the scanty evidence that they were against brahmanical institutions and favourably disposed towards Buddhism and Jainism, that they put an end to the rule of the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas of the Sangam age, and that they were non-agricultural hill tribes who caused great havoc among settled agricultural population. The Kalabhra threat seems to have extended to the borders of the Chalukyas kingdom which emerged in north Karnataka for they too claim to have defeated them. This period is known as the 'Kalabhra Interregnum'.

35.4 THE RISE OF THE CHALUKYAS, THE PALLAVAS AND THE PANDYAS

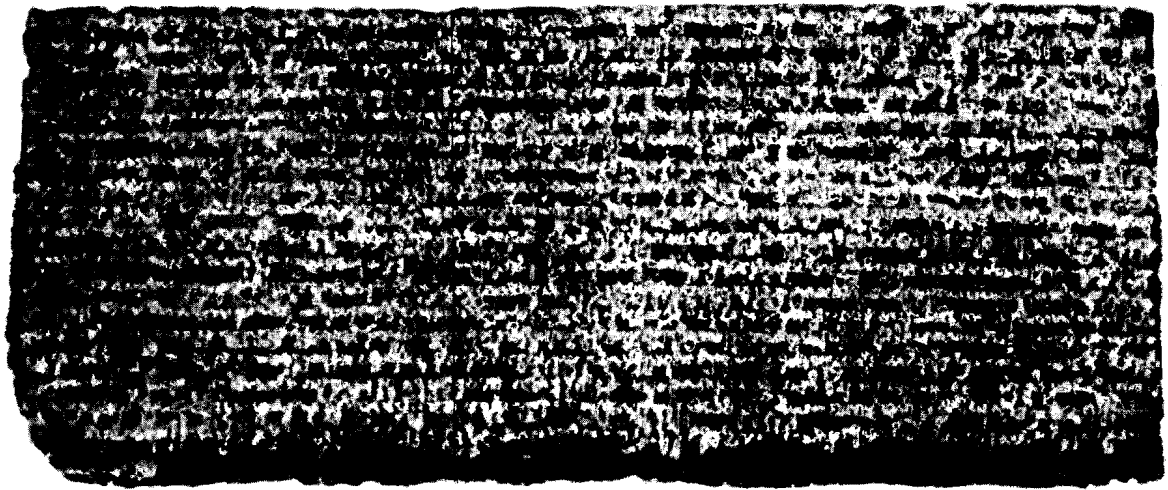
From the mid-sixth century A.D. the political scene in the Deccan and south India was dominated by the activities of three powers: the Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchi, and the Pandyas of Madura.

35.4.1 The Chalukyas

The Chalukyas became a sovereign power with Pulakesin-I. He laid the foundations of his kingdom by making the hill near Badami in the Bijapur district of Karnataka into a strong, fortress in 543-44 A.D. and performed a horse sacrifice. His successors overthrew the Kadambas and annexed their kingdom gradually, and also subjugated the Mauryas of Konkan (the coastal strip of Maharashtra). With the expeditions of Pulakesin-II the

Chalukyas became the Paramount power in the Deccan as the Western Gangas and the Alupas in the south and the Latas, Malavas and Gurjaras in the north offered their submission to him. The army of Pulakesin-II checked the forces of Harshavardhana on the banks of the Narmada.

Pulakesin-II also defeated the Vishnukundins of Andhra delta. But he was not satisfied with demanding just offers of submission as the Krishna-Godavari delta with almost one million acres of rich arable land was too valuable a possession. So about 621 A.D. he sent his younger brother Vishnuvardhana to consolidate the conquest and take over the area. In 631 A.D. Vishnuvardhana was allowed to form his own kingdom. Thus, began the line of the Chalukyas of Vengi or Eastern Chalukyas, who remained in control of the area for more than five hundred years.



9. Aihole Inscription of Pulakesin-II

35.4.2 The Pallavas

The rise of the Pallavas began with Simhavishnu about the middle of the sixth century A.D. He put an end to the Kalabhra Interregnum in Tandaimandalam (Kanchi Region), and extended his kingdom southward up to the Kaveri delta. He was succeeded by Mahendravarman-I, who annexed territories in the north up to the river Krishna. The Pallava kings also secured submission from the neighbouring chieftains and kings, and thus reached the zone of influence of the Chalukyas of Badami, and of the Pandyas. Even the Pandyas had to accept their overlordship briefly. Thus by the middle of the seventh century A.D. the Pallavas had set up a powerful regional kingdom in south India. Their power began to weaken from the mid-eighth century when the Chalukyas were being replaced by the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan. By the early tenth century A.D. the Pallava rule came to an end when Aparajata was defeated by Aditya Chola-I.

35.4.3 The Pandyas

The Pandyas come to light with king Kadungon towards the close of the sixth century A.D. when he suppressed the Kalabhras. The Pandyas ruled in the southernmost districts of Tamilnadu, with the Vaigai river basin as the heartland of the kingdom. They constantly tried to extend their sway over the Kaveri delta in the north and Cera country (Kerala) in the southwest.

35.4.4 Other Powers

The Gangas continued to rule in Gangavadi in south Karnataka. Besides, there were several other small kingdoms and chieftaincies in the Deccan and south India at this time, such as the Nolambas, the Banas, the Silaharas, etc. Unlike in northern India there are no continuous stretches of river valleys and plains here. The major river valleys such as the Raichur Doab (between the Tungabhadra and the Krishna), the Krishna-Godavari delta, the lower Kaveri valley and the Vaigai valley are separated from each other by rugged mountainous

territories. Moreover, there were vast expanses of forests that divided cultivated zones. All this encouraged political fragmentation and allowed small political units to survive in isolated pockets of habitation. The above-mentioned important river valleys could and did support greater kingdoms such as the Chalukyas of Badami (Raichur Doab), the Pallavas (Palar river valley), and so on. But it was a difficult task for any one of the regional kingdoms to extend its sway over the rest, much more difficult than in the case of northern India. This comes out very clearly in the following account of the mutual conflicts of the Chalukyas, the Pallavas and the Pandyas.

35.5 CONFLICTS BETWEEN DIFFERENT POWERS

The political history of this period is marked by frequent wars between the Chalukyas of Badami and the Pallavas, and between Pandyas and the Pallavas. Hostilities began with the raid of Chalukyas Pulakesin-II, who defeated Mahendravarman and occupied the northern part of Pallava kingdom. In another campaign he vanquished the Banas (the 'feudatories' of the pallavas in Rayalseema) and once again threatened Kanchi. But he was badly defeated in several battles by Narasimhavarman-I, who had succeeded Mahendravarman. Narasimhavarman then attacked the Chalukyas, captured Badami and probably killed Pulakesin-II. The situation was saved by the latter's son Vikramaditya-I. He drove out the Pallavas, formed an alliance with the Pandyas, and repeatedly raided into Pallava territory. The reign of one of his successors, Vikramaditya-II, is especially marked in this connection, for he is said to have overrun and looted Kanchi three times.

Without going into the details of particular wars and battles, we may note that the Pallavas had to engage in battles with the Pandyas too.

It is remarkable that in these conflicts it was always the Pallavas who were the target of attack. This was not just because they were situated between the Chalukyas and the Pandyas, but mainly because they were the most prosperous of all. It is significant that it was always the Chalukyas who attacked the Pallavas and that the Pallavas concerned themselves mainly with driving them back into their territory. The only exception was the raid of Narasimhavarman-I into Chalukyan kingdom and his occupation of its capital. But this was a retaliatory move, and was made only once in the entire history of the conflict. Another time Pallava Paramesvaravarman-I launched an expedition into Chalukyan kingdom as a diversionary move. Paramesvaravarman wanted to get rid of the Chalukyan forces occupying his kingdom by diverting their attention.

The same is true of the Pandyas, who fought repeatedly with the Pallavas for the control of the Kaveri delta. The Sangam literature as well as the account of Hiuen-tsang suggests that the Vaigai river valley—the core of Pandyan kingdom—was relatively poor agriculturally. The Pandyas must have realised that if they wanted to be rich and powerful, they would have to control the rich Kaveri delta. They seemed to have fought the Pallavas with this purpose in mind, and by the early ninth century A.D. they eventually came to control this area.

35.5.1 The Role of the Minor Kings

The lesser kings and chieftains took part in the conflict of the regional kingdoms as subordinate allies of one or the other of these powers. Pulakesin-II had to subdue the Banas—allies of the Pallavas—before attacking Narasimhavarman-I. Similarly, Pallava general Udayachandra engaged in battles with Sabara king Udayana and Nishada chieftain Prithiviyaghrā, who probably sided with the Chalukyas. These subordinate allies shared not only in the plunder but could add new areas to their realm as well.

When we look at the smaller principalities individually, we do not find them worthy of attention. That is because each small kingdom by itself was insignificant, a non-entity. But taken together, they no doubt represent a political force to reckon with in the affairs of the Deccan and south India. Equally striking is the inability of any King from the fourth to the ninth century A.D. to establish his hold over the Deccan and south India. For these six centuries political disunity was the norm despite the energetic efforts and ambitions of a number of kings. As already noted, the broken geography of southern India had a role to play here, in political disunity as well as in the importance of lesser kings and chieftains.

35.5.2 Other Dimensions of Political Conflicts

An important offshoot of the Pallava-Chalukya conflict was the emergence of the kingdom of the Chalukyas of Lata or south Gujarat. As a result of Narasimhavarman's occupation of Badami and the death of Pulakesin-II, there was terrible confusion and political disorder in the Chalukya kingdom. In the task of restoring unity to it and suppressing the hostile forces, and of driving out the Chalukyas, Vikramaditya-I had been greatly helped by his younger brother Jayasimhavarman. In return, Vikramaditya rewarded his brother by giving away south Gujarat to him.

35.5.3 Relations with other Countries

A noteworthy feature of south Indian politics at this time was an active interest in the political affairs of Sri Lanka. In the battles with the Chalukyas we hear that Narasimhavarman-I had a Lankan Prince Maravarma on his side. He had been driven into exile and had sought refuge at the Pallavan court. After his return from Badami Narasimhavarman helped Maravarma to gain the throne at Anuradhapura by sending two naval expeditions. Later, when he had again been dispossessed of his kingdom, it was to the Pallava king that Maravarma looked for help. The Pandyans, too, showed keen interest in Sri Lanka, the wealth of which lured them into launching predatory raids into this area.

The Pallavas seem to have taken interest in and somehow influenced the politics of Southeast Asia. It is possible that Nandivarman-II Pallavamalla came from Southeast Asia to succeed to the Pallava throne in mid-eighth century. We also hear of the powerful fleet of Nandivarman-III and a Tamil record in Thailand mentions a Vishnu temple and a tank having one of his title. A more direct interference in South Asia, however, came only with the Cholas who put an end to Pallava dominance in south India.

35.5.4 Kerala

Kerala seems to have continued under the rule of the Perumals in this period, although the details of the political history of the Period are lacking. A famous ruler in this line was Cheraman Perumal (late 8th/early 9th century A.D.). He seems to have pursued his religion and religious policy in some extraordinary manner, so that the Jains, Christians, Saivites and Muslims do not just praise him as a patron, but actually claim him as a practitioner of their own religion. The prosperity of Malabar constantly attracted invaders from outside. Not only the Pandyas claim to have vanquished Kerala; the same claim is also made by Narasimhavarman; a number of Chalukya kings; and later by the Rashtrakutas.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - a) The political control of the Deccan continued to remain under one dynasty after the decline of Satavahanas.
 - b) The Vakatakas seem to have been peace-loving people.
 - c) Tamilnadu and Kerala were dominated by Kalabhras after the decline of Sangam period.
 - d) In the conflicts in south India the Pallavas were the targets of attack.
 - e) The prosperity of Malabar did not attract the invaders.
- 2) What do you know about the Chalukyas, Pallavas and Pandyas? Write in about ten lines.

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- 3) Discuss the nature of conflicts amongst the powers of south India. What role did the minor kings play in it? Answer in about ten lines.

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35.6 POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Let us briefly discuss the political organisation of these kingdoms.

35.6.1 The King and the Higher Stratum of Administration

We shall now proceed to discuss the patterns of administration that prevailed in these kingdoms. In theory the king was the source of all authority. He assumed high sounding titles such as **maharaja**, **bhattaraka**, **dharmamaharaja** **dhiraja**, etc. In the beginning kingship was governed by the Vedic ideal. We find kings proclaiming in their inscriptions that they performed horse sacrifices (**asvamedha**) and other Vedic sacrifices such as **vajapeya**, **rajasuya**, etc. During this period these sacrifices did not have the social significance they had in the later Vedic period. But they had a special political meaning as they served to underline the independence of a particular king and justified his right to rule. Thus Pulakesin-I, the founder of the Chalukya kingdom performed a horse sacrifice to mark the beginning of his dynastic rule. The same was done by many other kings. Gradually, however, as the religious milieu changed, the ideal of kingship changed too and the practice of making royal Vedic sacrifices fell into disuse.

The King was helped by his ministers at the court. Members of the royal family including the crown prince (**yuvaraja**) took an important part in running the government at higher levels. Then there were a number of officials of various ranks who discharged various administrative duties in the name of the King. An important part of their job was to collect taxes. There was a principal tax on land amount to one-sixth or more of the produce, in addition to a number of miscellaneous taxes such as those on weavers, draught cattle, marriage parties and so on. Besides collecting taxes the state officials maintained law and order and adjudicated cases of crime and civil disputes that came before them.

35.6.2 Administrative Units

The kingdom was divided into a hierarchy of administrative units. In the Deccan these units were called **vishaya**, **ahara**, **rashtra**, etc. From the eight century A.D. there developed a trend in the Deccan of dividing kingdoms into a hierarchy of the multiples of ten villages. Less often a district consisted of twelve villages. In the Pallava kingdom the **nadu** emerged as the main, lasting unit of administration.

The Kings of this period realised the importance of agriculture, the revenue from which was the main basis of their wealth and strength. It is significant that **nadu**, the basic political unit in Pallava (and later in Chola) times, also meant arable land in contrast to **Kadu**, non-cultivable waste. Therefore, the state made all attempts to encourage the extension of agriculture. King Mayurasarman of Kadamba dynasty is said to have brought vast tracts of virgin land to the plough by inviting brahmanas from afar. For probably the same purpose a Pallava King gave away a thousand ploughs. Moreover, as agriculture depended a great deal

on irrigation in south India, the Pallavas took great interest in the provision and maintenance of canals, tanks, lakes and large wells.

35.6.3 Local Associations

A characteristic feature of south Indian polity, especially Pallavan, was the importance of local corporate units in most important aspects of the lives of people. There were innumerable local groups and associations based on caste, craft, profession or religious persuasion. Thus there were associations of handicraftsmen like the weavers, oil pressers etc., of merchants like the Nanadesis, the Manigramam and the Five Hundred of Ayyavole, of students, of ascetics, of temple priests, etc. In addition, there were three important territorial assemblies: **ur**, **sabha** and **nagaram**. **Ur** was a non-brahmanical village assembly, **Sabha** was a village assembly consisting only of brahmanas, and **nagaram** was an assembly where merchantile interests predominated (**nagaram** had some agricultural interests too, however). The members of an assembly used to meet annually while the day-to-day tasks were looked after by a smaller executive body. Each group functioned autonomously in accordance with its own constitution based on custom and usage, and took care of the problems of its members at the local level. In matters affecting people of more than one assembly or association, decision was taken by mutual deliberation.

Local administration through the corporate units greatly lightened the burden of the government. It not only gave a chance to population to air its grievances and problems, but also fixed responsibility on the people themselves for redressing the grievances and solving the problems. This strengthened the basis of the state by minimising opposition to it as the people could not hold the government responsible for these matters.

That is why we do not find the Pallava kings trying to encroach upon the functioning of the local autonomous corporate groups. But they did seek to strengthen their own base by bringing in brahmanas and creating privileged brahmana settlements by making landgrants to brahmanas, either directly (called **brahmadaya** or in the name of a temple (called **devadana**). These brahmana settlements were created all over the core areas of the Pallava kingdom. The 'core areas' were the most prosperous areas based on irrigated rice cultivation, on the prosperity of which the strength of the Pallavas depended. As we have seen, the village assembly of **brahmanas** was called **sabha** or **mahasabha**. During the late Pallava period the **sabha** developed the system of governance through committees. This is known as the committee or *variya*m system. It became a hallmark of self-government in brahmana settlements in south India. The **sabha** managed a number of tasks mostly through these committees—maintenance of tanks and roads, management of charitable donations and of temple affairs, and regulation of irrigation rights.

In the Deccan, the role of local associations and assemblies was less conspicuous. In place of corporate institutions it was the local notables called **mahajanas** who took part in local administration in villages and towns in Chalukya times. In villages the mahajanas had a leader called gamunda (headman). These notables did not enjoy the same kind of autonomy as was the case with south Indian assemblies, but were closely supervised by state officials.

Brahmana settlements, however, were to be found all over the Deccan as well as in South India. We do not know precisely how the brahmanas in the Deccan managed their collective affairs. But since they were all a creation of kings and chiefs they must have looked after the interests of the government in the locality.

35.7 RELATIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF RULERS

The relations between big kings and their lesser allies is a matter of controversy. Broadly there are two views about the relations between powerful kings, and minor kings and chieftains. First, it is said that smaller kings and chieftains regarded a big king, especially the Pallavas, as their overlord on religious grounds. The Pallava kings used to participate in elaborate religious ceremonies which gave them a high ritual status. It was this high ritual status that was respected by lesser kings and chiefs. This theory is not supported by historical evidence. It cannot explain how these minor kings could shift their respect from the Pallavas to the Chalukyas, or why they should stop respecting any high ritual status king

in volatile political situations and declare their independence, or why they should again be made to respect the ritual status by force.

The alternative view regards these smaller kings and chieftains as the 'feudatories' of major powers. But 'feudatory' is a technical term which stands for a special kind of relationship that existed in medieval western Europe. We are not sure whether the same relation was there between the Pallavas or the Chalukyas and the lesser kings and chiefs. That is why, we have preferred a neutral term "subordinate ally" to describe the relation of minor political powers with the major ones.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss the role of local associations in administration. Answer in about ten lines.

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2) Highlight the relations between different categories of rulers. Answer in about ten lines.

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35.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt about the political situation in the Deccan and south India upto the mid-sixth century A.D. After this period we find that the Chalukyas, Pallavas and the Pandyas were the major political powers in the region. There were certain minor powers also but their role was not very significant. The major powers were constantly in conflict with each other and the minor powers did side with one or other major power during these conflicts.

As far as the political organisation is concerned the king remained the central figure of administration and was helped by other officials. A significant feature was the role of local associations in the day-to-day administrative work.

35.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) × b) √ c) √ d) √ e) ×
- 2) Base your answer on Sec. 35.4
- 3) Base your answer on Sec. 35.5

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Base your answer on Sub-sec 35.6.3.
- 2) Base your answer on Sec. 35.7.

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

Agarawal Ashvini, *Rise and Fall of Imperial Guptas*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi 1989.

Gupta, P.L. *Imperial Guptas*, Varanasi

Nilakanta Shastry, K.A. *A History of South India*, Oxford, N. Delhi. 1974.

Thaper Romila, *History of India* V.I. Pelican, 1983.

UNIT 36 CHANGES IN ECONOMY

Structure

- 36.0 Objectives
- 36.1 Introduction
- 36.2 Explaining the Economic Changes
- 36.3 Decline of Trade
- 36.4 Paucity of Coins
- 36.5 Decline of Towns
- 36.6 Agrarian Expansion
 - 36.6.1 Advances in Agricultural knowledge and Technology
 - 36.6.2 Crops and Plants
- 36.7 Rural Settlements
- 36.8 New Pattern of Agrarian Relations
 - 36.8.1 Obligations of the Peasants
 - 36.8.2 Feudal Land Tenure
 - 36.8.3 Growth of Closed Economy
- 36.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 36.10 Key Words
- 36.11 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercises

36.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit our intention is to give you an idea of the economic changes in the Gupta and especially post-Gupta times. We shall thus discuss one major aspect of the transition to early medieval India. After reading this unit you should be able to understand:

- the origin and economic implications of landgrants,
- the process and consequences of the gradual decline of cities and other urban settlements,
- the nature of villages and of village economy,
- the nature of agrarian relations, and
- changes which led to improvements in agricultural production.

36.1 INTRODUCTION

The Gupta and post-Gupta period was characterised by certain changes in Indian economy.

We have already mentioned in Block 8 (Unit 33) that trade and urban settlements, which were so much prominent features of Indian society started declining from the Gupta period onward. There are many indications of these changes :

- 1) Many important cities (such as Taxila, Kausambi, Pataliputra) ceased to exist after the Gupta period. This decline of urban settlements was not an isolated phenomenon ; it seems to have been quite widespread;
- 2) Trade activities also suffered a setback because of various reasons. This is perhaps most clear from the fact that minting and circulation of coins were on a much more limited scale than before.

Details of these changes will be taken up for discussion later.

It may be noted that many of these changes had begun in the Gupta period itself. The decline of towns did not mean the overall contraction of the economy. However, let it be admitted that the economy, instead of walking on two legs — agriculture and urban activities of crafts production and trade — began to walk on one leg. It was predominantly agrarian economy.

36.2 EXPLAINING THE ECONOMIC CHANGES

How does one explain these changes ? According to the assessment of some historians the crucial element in the chain of developments was the system of landgrants. Landgrants grew in number in the Gupta and especially post-Gupta times and became widespread throughout the country. Landgrants were made to brahmanas and religious establishments like temples and monasteries on a large scale by kings, chiefs, members of the royal family and their feudatories. Earlier the Satavahanas in the Deccan had given away only revenue rights. From the fifth century onwards not only were the revenues of the donated lands transferred to the donee but the mines and minerals in the said area also transferred. The donated land, village or villages were exempted from the interference of soldiers and royal officials. Finally, kings and princes made over to the brahmana donees even the right to punish all offences against family, private property and person, with the privilege to enjoy the fines thus received.

The frequency of grants to different categories of officials for their services to the state was much less than the religious grants. Contemporary **Dharmasastra** literature recommended the grant of land or of revenues therefrom to state officials, in lieu of their salary. However, the actual evidence for such non-religious grants are not many in the period under discussion. Their numbers increased in subsequent times, i.e. 9-10th centuries. These grants were accompanied by concessions and rights similar to those mentioned in the religious grants to brahmanas, temples and monasteries.

Among other things, landgrants also had a bearing on the question of land rights, the socio-economic conditions of the peasantry, the right to free enterprise of craftsmen and traders in the donated towns and the emergence of a relatively closed economy. The residents of donated villages and towns were asked to comply with the order of the beneficiary, besides making over the various kinds of payments. Two forged charters of the 7th century, ascribed to Samudragupta, prohibit tax-paying peasants and artisans from leaving their own villages and settling in tax-free villages. The practice of transferring peasants along with the land, to the advantage of the donee, began in Central India, Orissa and Gujarat in the sixth century and was fairly common in several parts of India around the eighth century. Moreover, artisans and merchants too were tied down to their habitations to serve the local clientele and masters. In the Deccan and South India artisans were made over to the temples and monasteries. Hiuen Tsang also provides evidence for such donations. The condition of the merchants was in no way better. A few charters of the 6th-8th centuries from the western Deccan refer to restrictions under which merchants were required to function.

The attachment of peasants, artisans and merchants to their respective settlements and restrictions on their movements created an atmosphere of which the emergence of a closed economy was the natural result.

36.3 DECLINE OF TRADE

One of the conspicuous economic changes in the Gupta and post-Gupta period was the decline of trade, both internal and external. Indian foreign trade registered a peak during the post-Mauryan period, when India traded with the Roman empire, Central Asia and South-East Asia. However, commercial decline set in during the Gupta period, and it became more pronounced by the middle of the sixth century A.D. The inflow of Roman coins into India stopped after the early centuries of the Christian era. Other evidences suggesting contact with the western world are also absent. Further, the Roman empire itself broke up at a later date. The emergence of the Arabs and the Persians as competitors in trade did not augur well for Indian merchants. Some Byzantine coins ranging up to the sixth century, have been found in Andhra and Karnataka. But numerically they cannot be compared to the rich hoards of the early Roman coins. Silk and spices were important items in the Indo-Byzantine trade. The Byzantium, however, learnt the art of growing silk worms in the middle of the sixth century A.D. Consequently the silk trade was badly affected. The migration of silk weavers from Gujarat and their taking to other vocations acquires meaning in this context. Gupta ties with Central Asia were also weak. Whatever little remained of the contacts with Central Asia and Western Asia were completely wiped off by the Huna invasions.

It is said that the coastal towns of India carried on some trade with countries of South-East Asia and China. However, this interaction does not appear to have been of any intense kind. There is evidence for the spread of many cultural influences from India to South-East Asia in early historical and early medieval times but there is no evidence of pottery, coins or other objects of this kind on either side to suggest robust commercial interactions. Earlier, India had carried on trade in beads and some other items with some areas of South-East Asia, but after the fourth century A.D. there is no evidence for such trade. Not much can be made out of the Indian delegations to China. The number of such missions registered a declining trend from the sixth century onwards. Besides, the reported Chinese coins and celadon ware from Tamil Nadu are placed in the ninth century or later, and prior to that we have no other material remains to suggest any kind of Indo-Chinese trade.

Decline of trade was just not limited to foreign trade. Long distance internal trade too suffered owing to the weakening of links between coastal towns and the interior towns and further between towns and villages. The decay of towns and shrinkage in urban commodity production and the decline of trade were related problems. The decline of the status of traders and merchants in society during this period also indicates the falling fortunes of trade and commerce. The rise of numerous self-sufficient units dominated by landed beneficiaries also had adverse effect on trade. In fact, the *Kathasaritasagara*, a later work, suggests that traders moved through forests to avoid the multiple payment of duties. Sea voyages and long-distance travels were taboo. Such attitudes surely did not promote the cause of trade.

This, however, is not to deny that trade in basic necessities such as salt, iron artefacts etc. continued.

These essential commodities are not available everywhere. Moreover, some long-distance trade went on in prestigious, expensive luxury goods such as precious stones, ivory and horses. There was a demand for such commodities among the aristocracy, chiefs and kings. It thus seems that for quite a few centuries large-scale, organised trade was replaced by itinerant petty traders, pedlars and trickle trade.

36.4 PAUCITY OF COINS

Decline of commerce is demonstrated by the paucity of coins in the post-Gupta period. Gold coins which were so abundant during the periods of the Kushanas and of the Guptas went out of circulation after the sixth century. The absence of silver and copper coins also attracts attention. It may be mentioned that the percentage of gold in the Gupta gold coins was constantly falling and that the gold content of the later Gupta coins was only half of that of the Kushana coins. Further, in terms of quantity the coinage of the Gupta period does not compare well with those of the early Christian centuries. The epigraphic references to coins during this period do not amount to much in the absence of actual finds. The coins of Harshavardhana are too meagre and the Rastrakutas and the Palas who came to power in the Deccan and Bengal respectively, in the eighth century, issued no coins. Metallic currency was absent in most parts of northern India, Bengal, Orissa, Central India and the Deccan. What was true of these regions also holds good for South India. Various studies also indicate the almost total absence of coin moulds and commercial seals in the said period. However, in contrast to the general situation in most parts of the country, the Punjab region and north western part of the subcontinent has yielded numerous coins up to 1000 A.D. Besides, coin finds have also been reported from Kashmir.

It has been argued by some historians that earlier coins served the purpose of currency in later period and rendered the issue of fresh coins unnecessary. However, the period under discussion was characterised by unprecedented agrarian expansion and this alone would have normally necessitated more metallic money. Further, coins were an expression of sovereignty. Unless the compulsions were serious enough no ruler would have willingly forgone the privilege of minting coins in his own name. The decline of trade and the grant of land to high functionaries in lieu of money payments did away with the need for coins. Moreover, there is evidence for barter and the use of cowries as a medium of exchange in daily transactions.

36.5 DECLINE OF TOWNS

Decline in trade, paucity of coins and absence of coin moulds and commercial seals indicate economic decline and fall in demand for finished products. Towns which were active centres of craft production in the post-Mauryan period experienced decay and desertion. The pre-Kushana and Kushana towns in northern India and those associated with the Satavahanas in the Deccan began to decay from the middle of the third or the fourth century. What was true of northern India, Malwa and the Deccan was equally true of southern India. Actually, urban decline took place in two phases. The first coincided with the rise of the Guptas. During this period sites such as Sanghol, Hastinapur, Atranjikhhera, Mathura, Sonkh, Sravasti, Kausambi, Khairadih, Chirand, Tamluk, etc., in the Upper and Middle Gangetic plains experienced decline. Early prosperous centres such as Ujjain, Nagar, Pauni, Ter, Bhokardan, Nasik, Paithan etc., spread over Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra witnessed similar trends. Arikamedu in Tamil Nadu and the Satavahana urban centres in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were no exception to this phenomenon. The habitational deposits of the fourth-sixth centuries at all such sites are thinner compared to those of the earlier centuries and yield poorer and lesser material remains. The Gupta layers at many sites exhibit the reuse of raw materials, like bricks, from earlier deposits. The spatial spread of urban centres and the available civil amenities were nowhere near what it was earlier during the Kushana period. Numerically, very few sites like Pataliputra, Vaishali, Varanasi and Bhita survived the first phase of decay. These towns were in the heartland of the Gupta state and that possibly accounts for their survival. The second phase of urban decay set in after the sixth century and these centres ceased to be towns thereafter.

In a situation of general decline of crafts and commodity manufacture, the making of stone beads, manufacture of shell objects and of ivory and glass objects registered overall collapse. These objects are very scantily found in post-fifth century habitational deposits. Post-Gupta pottery likewise shows no artistic skill and is largely of ordinary variety.

The decline of towns and cities is reflected in contemporary literature and inscriptions as well. Up to the sixth century inscriptions and seals refer to the importance of artisans, craftsmen and merchants in the life of the towns. Inscriptions from Bengal suggest that they played an important role in urban administration. However, after the sixth century such information is not forthcoming. The change in the meaning of certain terms in the post-Gupta times also indicates the changing conditions. For example, the term **Sreni** which stood for guilds came also to mean caste and the term **nigama** came to mean villages. Varahamihira's **Brihat Samhita**, a work belonging to the first half of the sixth century, speaks of the decline of crafts, towns and trade. The decline of Buddhist towns in northern India is attested by the account of Hiuen Tsang who visited India during the time of Harshavardhana. Unlike the robust urban life so vividly depicted in Vatsyana's **Kamasutra**, post-Gupta literature such as the **Kuttanimatam** of Damodaragupta (7th century) is concerned with life in the countryside.

All settlements, however, were not rural. In the post-Gupta period non-agriculturist settlements appeared as seats of administration, military garrisons and religious or pilgrimage centres. Military camps are referred to as **skandhavana** in inscriptions of the fifth-eighth centuries. There is evidence to suggest that certain towns continued to survive as a result of their conversion to centres of pilgrimage. All these non-agriculturist settlements, variously known as **pura**, **pattana**, **nagara** and **rajadhani**, were centres of consumption and not production.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss in about 10 lines the factors responsible for the decline of trade.

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- 2) Which of the following statements are right (✓) and wrong (×).
- The paucity of coins does not demonstrate a decline in commerce during the post-Gupta period.
 - The post-Gupta period witnessed a decline of urban settlements.
 - The number of landgrants to religious establishments increased during the post-Gupta period.
 - In some regions, there started a practice transferring peasants along with the land to the donees.
 - The coastal terms of India had no trade links with the countries of South-East Asia.

36.6 AGRARIAN EXPANSION

The epigraphic evidence that we have for the Gupta and post-Gupta times suggests agrarian growth and rural expansion on an unprecedented scale. The patronage extended by kings, princes and chiefs to agriculture, improvement in irrigational facilities, increasing knowledge of agricultural sciences etc. were some of the causative factors which strengthened rural economy.

Decline of towns may have led to the migration of a number of skilled artisans into the countryside. Some of them even changed their vocations. The dispersal of technical skill along with artisans and craftsmen into the countryside stimulated agrarian growth. Landgrants in tribal frontiers brought virgin land under cultivation.

About fifty ruling powers were in existence in the fifth to the seventh centuries, in the Deccan and Central India. They were spread over Maharashtra, eastern Madhya Pradesh, Andhra, Orissa and Bengal. The various new ruling dynasties in this region issued their own landgrants which indicate the existence of officials, armymen etc. in their kingdoms. Each of these states depended on revenues from land and agriculture. In fact, in post-Gupta times agriculture constituted the basis of the state. Thus, the rise of states in such areas in which states were absent earlier presupposes agrarian expansion and the spread of village economy.

Numerous villages with Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit names came up in this period. Contemporary literature presents, a vivid account of village life and reflect the richness of rural settlements. The **Skanda Purana** mentions numerous villages region-wise. Similarly, texts belonging to a later period deal with the establishment and spread of rural settlements in western and southern India. The landgrant charters themselves record innumerable village names in post-Gupta times. These include names of older settlements. However, new ones too emerged on a large scale. We come across village names not only when such villages were donated but also when other villages were mentioned as boundaries of donated villages.

36.6.1 Advances in Agricultural Knowledge and Technology

The increasing concern with agriculture can be seen in the detailed instructions regarding agriculture in the **Brihat Samhita**, **Agni Purana**, **Vishnudharmottara Purana** and **Krishiparasara**. The importance of manure for crop cultivation is clearly laid down in the **Harshacharita**. It is mentioned that cowdung and refuge were used for manuring the fields. The **Harshacharita** also speaks about different types of cultivation — plough cultivation, spade cultivation and slash and burn cultivation. The attention paid to agriculture by rulers and landed beneficiaries can also be seen in the detailed descriptions of the plough and the improvement in irrigation techniques. The popularity and wide prevalence of the land measure called **hala** during this period underlines the significance of the plough. The **Kashyapiyakrisisukti**, a text whose core is placed in the eighth-ninth centuries, deals with all aspects of agriculture at length. From the last centuries of the first millennium A.D. onwards we have texts which suggest different methods for the treatment of plant and animal diseases.

The **Harshacharita** speaks of some irrigation facilities in the region around western Uttar Pradesh. It mentions such devices for irrigation as the **Udghataghathi** and the **ghatiyantra**. Inscriptions from Bengal mention rivers, rivulets and channels in the context of rural settlements and their boundaries and we also come across the expression **devamatrika** (watered by rain) suggesting the dependence of agriculture on rains and rivers. In South India tanks and reservoirs were built to irrigate the fields. In some cases they were the major landmarks in the countryside; this goes to suggest their importance. During the rule of the Pallavas in South India there were elected committees (**eri-variyaams**) in the villages to look after the construction and maintenance of tanks and reservoirs. Several Pallava rulers are credited with the construction of such irrigational facilities. By the tenth century **araghattas** or irrigational wells were in vogue in rural south eastern Marwar in Rajasthan. It may be assumed that they had come into use at an earlier date.

36.6.2 Crops and Plants

Varieties of cereals, including rice, wheat and lentil; legumes, vegetables and fruits are mentioned in the **Amarakosha** which is dated to the Gupta period. People possessed the knowledge of fruit grafting as is evident from the **Brihat Samhita**. Hieun Tsang mentions varieties of rice, mustard, ginger, numerous vegetables and fruits. The **Harshacharita** similarly provides a good account of crops and plants. We come across references to different types of rice, sugarcane, mustard, sesame, cotton, wheat, barley and pulses. Various kinds of spices such as turmeric, clove, black pepper and ginger were also grown. Vegetables such as gourd, pumpkin, cucumber, beans, garlic etc. were produced. Among fruits one may mention coconut, arecanut, jackfruit, oranges, **mahua** and mango. Betel leaf was also grown. Some of these plants and fruits are also recorded in the inscriptions of the period. Bana's **Harshacharita** had a wide geographical canvass and in addition to the Upper and Middle Gangetic plains it included descriptive details about Assam, Bengal and Central India. Therefore, we come across references to bamboos, cotton plants, loads of flax and hemp bundles in Central India, and cane, bamboo and silk in the context of eastern India. In the Pallava and Chalukya territories roughly spread over Tamil Nadu, the Western Deccan and parts of Karnataka rice, millets, gingelly and sugarcane were cultivated. The fruits that were grown included plantain, jackfruit, mango and coconut. Unmistakably, the number and variety of crops, fruits and vegetables are striking. The presence of brahmanas and artisans in rural settlements, land reclamation, certain changes in technology and the expansion of irrigational facilities stimulated the proliferation of crops and plants. The consequence of all these developments was unprecedented growth of rural economy.

36.7 RURAL SETTLEMENTS

The above mentioned developments took place in rural settlements in early medieval India. **Grama** was the usual term for villages. However, all rural settlements were not of the same kind. We come across other terms denoting different types of rural settlements. **Palli** normally meant a tribal village. The expression **Pataka** stood for a part of a village. It was a kind of a hamlet with a name of its own but actually formed a part of a larger village. The rise in the number of **Patakas** within the same village boundary evidently suggested the extension of agriculture. Settlements of herdsmen were called **ghosas**. However, it may be remembered that these terms representing different types of settlements were not always unchangable categories. With the spread of agriculture and brahmanical culture tribal hamlets too changed in character.

Further, owing to the convergence of several factors some villages could become meeting points for a group of rural settlements and develop into larger settlements. In fact, from circa A.D. 900 onwards some settlements thus developed into urban centres. It may be mentioned that the names of the settlements did not always reflect such changes. Even after a village settlement had grown in size and changed in character earlier village names continued to be in use. Villages could also be divided on the basis of their Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit names. While the non-Sanskrit names may suggest the gradual transformation of tribal hamlets to agricultural villages the Sanskrit names reflect the spread of Brahmanic culture and ideology.

What constituted a village? Generally, a village comprised the habitat (**vastu**), cultivated land (**Ksetra**) and uncultivated land. The last category included pasture land (**gochara**)

woods and forest. The issue of village boundaries, however, is problematic because they could not have always been well defined. Settlements, as we know by now, could always grow and expand. At times village boundaries could coincide with natural boundaries like rivers and/or hills. But in instances where settlements were contiguous the spatial limits of a village could be specified by referring to the adjoining villages. A large number of copper-plate charters of the post-Gupta period while recording landgrants describe various types of land which include cultivated, uncultivated, high, low, water-logged, marshy, grassy and forest land. The productivity of the soil and the quality of the land seem to have been on the basis of such elaborate description of the types. Such elaborate descriptions of various types of land also suggest growing importance of agriculture and animal husbandry.

Villages donated to brahmanas came to be known as **brahmadeyas** and **agraharas**.

Villages which were donated to and inhabited by brahmanas were **brahmadeyas**.

Agrahara villages, although they were inhabited by brahmanas, were associated with non-brahmanas as well. The proprietary right of such villages, however, belonged to the brahmanas only. In South India such villages were also known as **mangalams**. Both types of brahmanic settlements in south India can be distinguished from the non-brahmanic ordinary villages at the level of administrative and social organization. While the **sabha** represented the brahmanic settlements, the **ur** represented the ordinary village settlement. It is difficult to work out the ratio between the two types of settlements for any part of the country. Ordinary villages, as we know by now, were being frequently donated to brahmanas. Nevertheless, it may be said that the donated villages formed only a part of the total number of rural settlements.

36.8 NEW PATTERN OF AGRARIAN RELATIONS

We shall now discuss the main features of agrarian relations which developed in the early medieval period.

36.8.1 Obligations of the Peasant

Landgrant charters bestowed the beneficiary with superior rights over and above those of the inhabitants in the donated village/villages. The donee was entitled to collect all kinds of taxes. He could collect regular and irregular taxes and fixed and unfix payments. The list of taxes in the inscriptions end with the expression **adi** meaning **et cetera** which could be used to the advantage of the landlord, when necessary. The donees enjoyed these exceptional advantages in addition to such regular taxes as **bhaga**, **bhoga**, **kara**, **uparikara**, **hiranya**, **udranga**, **halikakara**, etc. In fact, the peasantry in early medieval India was subjected to an ever increasing tax/rent burden. The Vakataka grants list fourteen types of dues. The Pallava records specify eighteen to twenty two of them. By the turn of the first millennium A.D. the number of taxes increased enormously.

The superior rights of the beneficiary in land are clear in the charters belonging to northern Maharashtra, Konkan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat in the Gupta and post-Gupta times. The donees were empowered with the right to evict the peasantry at will and to replace them with new peasants. From the seventh century onwards grants give away water resources, trees, bushes and pastures to the donee. The trend accelerated after the tenth century. The transfer of these resources to the donee not only affected the peasantry of the donated villages adversely but also strengthened the power of the donees. Forced labour is referred to in the **Skanda Purana**. Inscriptions too suggest that by the fifth-sixth centuries **vishti** was a well entrenched practice in western, central and southern India. In addition, the clause appeared in the landgrant charters asking the peasants to carry out the orders of the donee. In regions such as Chamba, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Eastern India the condition of the peasants clearly suffered a decline.

36.8.2 Feudal Land Tenure

Yajnavalkya and Brihaspati, authors of **Smriti** works, mention four grades of land rights in the same piece of land. According to them holders of rights of different grades were: the **Mahipati** (the king), **Kshetrasvamin** (the master of the land), **Karshaka** (cultivator) and the sub-tenant. Landgrants led to hierarchical rights over land and sub-infeudation. The practice gave rise to a hierarchy of landlords, which lived off the surplus produced by the actual cultivators. The religious establishments in eastern India and the south with their

enormous donations in land, cash, livestock etc. emerged as landed mangates at Ratnagiri in Orissa and at Nalanda in Bihar were recipients of large scale land donations. The Nalanda monastery enjoyed the gift of 200 villages. Moreover, land and villages were given away to the temples in south India during the reign of the Pallavas. The Chola records, in the succeeding period, more frequently refer to such **devadana** (literally 'given to gods') gifts of land. From the Pallava period onwards temple servants were remunerated through assignments of land. The implications are obvious. Religious establishments became landed beneficiaries and in turn they gave plots of land to their dependants such as petty officials, artisans, musicians, attendants etc. Such assignments could be subleased to the actual tiller of the soil. Likewise, temple land was leased out to tenants for cultivation. Grants of land to temples from the Pallava period onwards resulted in the growth of a complex system of land tenure. Intensification of the process, especially from the eighth century onwards, created a class of peasantry which was overburdened with taxes and which was subsistent to a class of dominant landlords with superior rights in land.

36.8.3 Growth of Closed Economy

Early medieval Indian economy experienced the rise and growth of a number of rural settlements which were not linked to exchange networks and long-distance trade.

Although the exchange networks did not entirely collapse, the transfer of settlements to various categories of donees had created a congenial atmosphere for the emergence of self-sustaining, closed units of production and consumption. Local needs came to be met locally. The movement of soldiers for wars, pilgrims to religious centres and brahmanas for the acquisition and enjoyment of landgrants were possibly the only forms of spatial mobility. The **Dharmasastras** restricted the movement of the brahmanas. In order to keep their Vedic and domestic fires burning they were not expected to travel long distances. Sea voyages were prohibited. Similarly, marriages in neighbouring areas were preferred. All this fostered strong local identities. The growing sense of localism and the self-sufficiency of the villages is reflected in expressions such as **gramadharama**, **gramacara**, and **sthanacara** all referring to village or local practices in contemporary Puranic literature.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the major advances made in the field of agricultural technology in about five lines.

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- 2) Discuss in about ten lines the main features of agrarian relations during the early medieval period.

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3) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×) ?

- i) Decline of towns does not lead to the migration of artisans to the countryside.
- ii) There are no references to irrigational facilities in the **Harshacharita**.
- iii) All rural settlements were not of an uniform pattern.
- iv) Villages donated to and inhabited by brahmanas were known as **brahmadeyas**.
- v) The **Dharmasastra** restricted the movement of the brahmanas.

36.9 LET US SUM UP

The different dimensions of change in economy from about the middle of the first millennium A.D. have been considered. These changes were extremely significant in so far as they brought the ancient period to an end and marked the beginning of a new stage in Indian history. The ways in which the new stage marked a departure from the ancient period can be seen in the major changes themselves. The Gupta and post-Gupta times were characterised by:

- the emergence of a class of landlords and a class of subjugated peasantry in an agrarian economy which was predominantly rural and agrarian,
- conspicuous decline of trade,
- decline of towns, and
- the paucity of metallic money.

However, the period was also characterised by immense dynamism. It is in this context that such changes as appeared later have to be appreciated: the growth of new crops, the construction of irrigational facilities, the increasing awareness about plant and animal diseases, the improvements in other aspects related to agriculture, the growth in the size of some settlements which emerged as meeting points in the midst of rural clusters and the re-emergence of exchange networks, fairs and trading centres.

36.10 KEY WORDS

Acculturation	: Adopt to a new culture
Barter	: Exchange of goods for other goods
Benefice	: Gifted landed property held by Brahmanas , etc.
Beneficiary	: receiver of benefits
Charter	: deed conveying grant of rights
Donee	: recipient of gift
Exotic	: introduced from abroad
Itinerant	: travelling from place to place
Pedlar	: travelling salesperson

36.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Compare your answer with the content in Sec. 36.3.
- 2) i) × ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) ✓ v) ×

Check Your Progress 2

1) See Sub-sec. 36.6.1

2) Consult Sec. 33.8

3) i) × ii) × iii) ✓ iv) ✓ v) ✓

UNIT 37 CHANGES IN SOCIETY

Structure

- 37.0 Objectives
- 37.1 Introduction
- 37.2 Feudal Hierarchy and the Varnas
- 37.3 Growth of the Kayasthas
- 37.4 The Untouchables
- 37.5 Crafts and Castes
- 37.6 Advance of Sudras and Decline of Vaisyas
- 37.7 Spread and Transformation of the Varna Hierarchy
- 37.8 Position of Women
- 37.9 Lords and Peasants
- 37.10 Proliferation of Castes
 - 37.10.1 The Brahmanas
 - 37.10.2 The Kshatriyas
 - 37.10.3 The Sudras
- 37.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 37.12 Key Words
- 37.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

37.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous Unit we discussed the major changes in economy in the Gupta and more particularly in the post-Gupta period. We intend to provide you with an idea of the different dimensions of change in society in this Unit. After reading this Unit you should be able to know:

- about the different forces which led to modifications in the structure and concept of varna hierarchy,
- the processes involved in the emergence and rapid increase in the number of new castes,
- the ways in which the condition of the untouchables in society became miserable,
- the ways in which the caste system marked a departure from what it was in the ancient period.

37.1 INTRODUCTION

The social changes in the Gupta and post-Gupta times can be related to the economic changes that we discussed in Unit 36. The major economic forces of the period were large-scale landgrants, decline of trade, commerce and urban life; paucity of money, agrarian expansion and growing agrarian character of society, and the emergence of relatively closed local units of production and consumption. On this basis evolved a social structure broadly characterised by a sizable ruling landed aristocracy, intermediaries and a large body of impoverished peasantry. The unequal distribution of landed property and power led to the emergence of new social groups and ranks which cut across varna divisions like **brahmana**, **kshatriya**, **vaisya** and **sudra**. The other important changes in the social structure involved the emergence and proliferation of new castes, the hardening of caste relations and the acculturation of the tribes. The acculturation of tribes was not simply the result of movement of Brahmanas into tribal areas as a result of landgrants. This was caused by the emergence of local royal families in remote areas, and the brahmanas were patronized mostly by these royal families with gifts of land, with employment at royal courts and other offers. This implies that when tribes lived there emerged a much more complex society in which social differentiation, represented by different groups like peasants, brahmanas, craftsmen, merchants, rulers etc, was present.

37.2 POLITICAL AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND THE VARNAS

Landgrants and the emerging landed intermediaries, wielding economic power and political authority, modified the **varna** divided society. The new social groups did not fit in with the four fold **varna** system. The unequal distribution of landed property created social ranks which cut across social status based on **varna** considerations. The **samantas** and the ruling landed aristocracy, irrespective of their social origins (**varna**/ritual ranks), emerged with a distinctive character. The brahmana landlords constituted a section of this class. They gave up their priestly function and diverted their attention to the management of land and people. Such groups of brahmanas had more in common with the ruling elite than with those who performed only priestly functions. In later times, titles such as **thakur**, **raut** etc. were conferred on them.

The inclusion of the foreign ethnic groups and indigenous tribal chieftains in the **kshatriya varna**, as part of the ruling aristocracy, and the acculturated tribes in the **Sudra varna** not only swelled their ranks but also transformed the **varna** divided society. Moreover, the earlier distinction between **dvija** (twice born) and **Sudra** began to be modified in the period.

Land came to acquire a special significance. Landed property or how much land one possessed emerged as the basis for differences in social status. This was not confined to any particular **varna**.

In other words, one's position in society did not simply depend on the **varna** to which one belonged. His social rank came to be connected with his position as a landholder, among different categories of landholders. These tendencies began in this period and got accentuated in the ninth-tenth centuries. From the ninth-tenth centuries, the **Kayasthas**, traders and members of the rich dominant peasantry were also conferred titles such as **ranaka**, **nayaka** and so on. They constituted a part of the upper section of the society and ruling landed elite. Varahamihira's **Brihatsamhita** takes cognizance of these changes. It tries to reconcile social ranks based on birth. Subsequently, many medieval texts on architecture also reflected this concern.

The Gupta and post-Gupta times were characterized by the emergence and spread of new **jatis** (castes). The increase in the number of new castes affected the **brahmanas**, the **kshatriyas**, the **kayasthas** and the **sudras**. The number of mixed castes and of the untouchable castes increased perceptibly. The transformation of craft guilds into castes as a result of the decline of trade and of urban centres and the localised hereditary character of the crafts helped the process of the formation of new **jatis**. The **Vishnudharmottara Purana**, a work of the eighth century, mentions that thousands of mixed castes were produced as a result of the union of Vaisya women with men of lower castes. This is in sharp contrast to the social situation in the early Christian centuries when the number of mixed castes, as mentioned by Manu, was just sixty one. The acculturation and incorporation of tribes and backward peoples as **sudra** castes significantly added to the number of new castes. In addition, one may mention the untouchables who had diverse origins.

Varnasamkara

Varnasamkara meant the inter-mixing and/or union of **varnas**/castes, normally not socially approved, leading to the emergence of mixed castes, which symbolised social disorder.

With the substantial increase in the number of new castes greater rigidity was introduced into the caste system and inter-caste marriages came to be viewed with disfavour. Earlier, **anuloma** marriages or marriages between a bridegroom from an upper caste and a bride from a lower caste, were sanctioned. It was the **pratiloma** marriage (the reverse of **anuloma**) which was censured. However, increasingly **anuloma** marriages too were not favoured.

37.3 GROWTH OF THE KAYASTHAS

The scribe or the **kayastha** community was a product of the socio-economic forces of the times. Landgrants involved the transfer of land revenues and land to brahmanas, religious establishments and officials. This and other complex administrative functions created the need for a body of scribes and record keepers who were employed to draft assignment of land and keep details of land transfer, including various items of revenue. The Gupta period witnessed the beginning of fragmentation of land. There were laws of partition and rural boundary disputes, which constitute a part of the **Dharmasastras**. The maintenance of proper records of individual plots was very much necessary for settling such disputes. The existence of different types of rights in the same plot or village(s) made the land system quite complex. Therefore, land records had to be maintained with all necessary details. This difficult job was carried out by a class of writers who were known variously as **kayastha**, **karana**, **karanika**, **pustapala**, **chitragupta**, **aksapatalika** etc. The kayasthas were only one group of the community of scribes. However, gradually the scribes and record keepers as a community came to be known as **kayasthas**. Initially, the educated members from the upper **varnas** were called upon to work as **kayasthas**. In course of time the scribes recruited from various **varnas** began to limit their social interaction to members of their profession and started practising community endogamy and family exogamy. That completed the process of caste formation among the **Kayasthas** (endogamy and commensality are the two basic traits of the caste system. For meaning of these terms see key words.) The earliest reference to them dates back to the early centuries. From about A.D. 900 onwards they emerged as a powerful, assertive group occupying high offices in many states.

37.4 THE UNTOUCHABLES

The 'impure' castes or the untouchables had assumed a definite shape by the early Christian centuries. Nevertheless, they were numerically small. From around the 3rd century A. D. onwards the practice of untouchability appears to have intensified and the number of untouchables registered a rise. Katyayana, a **Dharmasastra** writer of the Gupta period, was the first to use the expression **asprasya** in the sense of untouchables. Several new castes were included in the category of the untouchables in the Gupta and post-Gupta times. Not only hunters and some groups of artisans became untouchables but backward agriculturists were also condemned to that status. By the turn of the first millennium A. D. hunters, fishermen, butchers, executioners and scavengers appear as untouchables. Kalidasa, Varahamihira, Fahsien, Bana and others have given a vivid account of the social disabilities imposed on them. The **Chandalas** were only one section of the untouchables, although the lowest in the social ladder. Interestingly, a caste hierarchy emerged among the untouchables as well. Contemporary literature describes them in very disparaging terms. Greed, impurity, untruth, theft, passion etc. are said to be their characteristic features.

It is difficult to explain the phenomenal growth in the number of untouchables during this period and later. However, brahmanical and Buddhist sources suggest that most untouchable castes were originally backward tribes. It has been argued that their backwardness and resistance to the process of acculturation and brahmanization may have prevented them from being absorbed within the society and pushed them to the position of untouchables. They may have been dispossessed of their lands and made to settle outside the villages. The contempt for the backward people, at times in inhospitable tracts, on the part of the brahmanas and ruling elite and on occasions the former's opposition to the brahmanical order, thus, appear to explain the numerical growth of the untouchables and the practice of untouchability. In this context of the growing demand for labour the presence of the untouchables as a depressed, dispossessed group of people was an enormous advantage to all other sections of rural society. The untouchables did not normally hold land, settled outside the villages and could not become peasants. They were condemned to menial jobs during slack periods of the year and were available for work during peak periods of agricultural activity. The untouchables thus provided labour which the society required but were socially condemned and segregated.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How far were the changes in the social order related to the changing economic patterns in the post-Gupta period. Explain in 15 lines.

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- 2) Which of the following statements are right or wrong ? Mark ✓ or × ?

- i) The unequal distribution of landed property and powers led to the emergence of new social groups which cut-across the traditional varna divisions.
- ii) The Buddhist sources suggest that the untouchable castes were not drawn from the backward tribes.
- iii) There was an emergence of local royal families in remote areas in the Gupta and post-Gupta period.

- 3) What do you understand by Varnasamskara. Answer in about 5 lines.

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37.5 CRAFT AND CASTES

During this period several groups of artisans and craftsmen lost their earlier status and many even came to be regarded as untouchables. To some extent this may have resulted from the decline of urban centres where craftsmen were in great demand. Craft guilds became transformed into castes and this transformation effectively sums up the changes in the nature and organization of craft production. Various castes such as the **svarnakara** (goldsmith), **malakara** (garland maker), **chitrakara** (painter), **napita** (barber), etc. emerged out of the numerous crafts (practised by different groups). Some categories of artisans were rendered untouchables. Weavers, dyers, tailors, barbers, shoemakers, ironsmiths, washermen and others were reduced to the position of untouchables by the turn of the millennium. Many of

them like the weaver, for example, occupied a high social position during the Gupta period. Thus, during the period under discussion, many groups of artisans steadily lost their position.

37.6 DECLINE OF THE VAISYAS AND RISE IN THE SOCIAL STATUS OF THE SUDRAS

The **Dharmasastras** and similar literature suggest that a major change was taking place in the social structure within the framework of the four **varnas**. A sizable section of the **sudras** were rising in social and economic status after their association with agriculture, and sections of the **vaisyas**, particularly those at the lower end, were descending to the level of the **sudras**. Thus, there was a change in the relative positions of the two lower **varnas**. The **sudras** were no longer slaves and servants; they emerged as tenants, share-croppers and cultivators. Urban decline too forced many **sudra** artisans to take to cultivation. Some law-books and the seventh century Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang mention agriculture as the duty of the **sudras**. The **sudra** is described as the giver of grain (**annada**) in the **Skanda Purana**.

During the heyday of Indian foreign trade in the post-Mauryan times the **vaisyas** got identified with urban occupations and towns. In a predominantly agrarian setting of the post-Gupta period, the **vaiśya** traders and merchants suffered economic loss and social degradation. Many of them crowded into agriculture to earn their living. According to evidence of texts, the lower strata of the **vaisyas** who were free peasant landholders till the Gupta period were increasingly reduced to a state of dependence and subjection. The distinction between the **vaisyas** and the **sudras** got blurred as the differences in their occupations and standards of living faded away. Therefore, in writing of the later period, for example in the writings of Albiruni, both of them were bracketed together.

37.7 SPREAD AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE IDEA OF VARNA HIERARCHY

The Varna system was also modified in course of its spread outside Gangetic northern India. The four-fold **varna** system did not prevail in eastern India in the Deccan and central India and the far South. The four-fold **varna** scheme had historical roots in northern India where it had evolved and got entrenched over time. When the idea of **varna** divided society spread into other regions, there was a marked difference in its essential details. The **brahmanas** spread to other parts of the country as a result of the landgrants from the fifth-sixth centuries. They conferred **brahmana** status on local priestly groups. The aboriginal tribes in the new areas were acculturated and integrated to the caste-peasant base of brahmanic society.

Although a few **brahmanas** and the brahmanic idea of **varna** had moved into the south earlier, brahmanic settlements called **agraharas** came into existence in Pallava and post-Pallava periods in South India. Brahmanization is evident in the evolution of educational institutions in the Pallava kingdom. From the 5th-6th centuries onwards **brahmanas** started migrating in different directions. During the 5th-7th centuries they also spread to the Deccan, central India, Orissa, Bengal and Assam. The influence of brahmanic culture in these regions is evident from the gifts of land to them and their eminent position.

The transformation of tribes into peasants within a complex social structure and considering them as belonging to **sudra** category were two major social processes in early medieval India. The **kshatriya varna** on the other hand, did not really take deep roots outside northern India. However, many ruling families in newly formed states claimed **kshatriya** status and also tried to prove that they had descended from the **Suryavansa** (solar line) and **Chandravansa** (Genar line). Further, the **vaiśya varna** did not emerge in these regions because by the time Brahmanism advanced to the Deccan, central India, eastern India and the South the distinction between **vaisyas** and **sudras** had got blurred.

Thus, outside the Gangetic regions, the two broad social categories were those of the **brahmanas** and the **sudras**. The **kshatriyas** never crystallized into a permanent, tangible community and the **vaiśya** status was claimed occasionally for brief periods, especially

during times of economic prosperity and flourishing trade and commerce. However, there were numerous occupational castes whose ranks kept swelling with the passage of time.

37.8 POSITION OF WOMEN

The impression that one gets about women's position in society during this period is that of progressive decline. The law-books provide for the marriage of women at an early age, pre-puberty marriage being preferred. Formal education was denied to them. Women and property came to be bracketed together with adverse consequences for women's status. They were generally denied property rights. However, in the case of widows there was some improvement in proprietary rights. It may be pointed out that the provision for **stridhana** (which literally means: wealth of women) actually did not amount to much, for it did not extend beyond rights to personal jewels, ornaments and gifts. The joint references to women and **sudras** in contemporary literature such as the **Brihatsamhita** amply demonstrates the plight of women. They were debarred from various sacrifices and ceremonies. The practice of **Sati** (or self-immolation by wife on the funeral pyre of her dead husband) gained social acceptance during this period. The earliest references to **sati** date to the later-Gupta period and the times of Harsavardhana. The change of women's **gotra** upon marriage can be dated to the period after the fifth century A.D. This constituted an important development because it marked the curtailment of their rights in their parental home and symbolised the final triumph of the patriarchal system of male-dominated society.

37.9 LORDS AND PEASANTS

It has already been pointed out that in the agrarian system of this period, there were different grades of landlords, as distinguished from the peasants. Terms such as **bhogi**, **bhokta**, **bhogapati**, **mahabhogi**, **brihadbhogi**, etc. were used for the landed beneficiaries. The upper crust of landlords included such dignitaries as **ranaka**, **raja**, **samanta**, **mahasamanta**, **mandalesvara** and so on. The king similarly had many high sounding titles, connoting his lordship and ownership of land. The various terms by which the lords of the land were known clearly suggest their superior status as enjoyers of landed estates. There is nothing in the terms to suggest that they were associated with actual cultivation. Here one may recall the various types of privileges and exemptions (discussed in the previous unit) that they enjoyed. The landgrant charters authorised the donees to punish people guilty of the ten offences (**dasaparadha**), including those against family, private property and person. They could also try civil cases. Such authority besides their economic dominance helped the big landholders in effectively exploiting the peasants.

The peasantry itself was not a homogeneous community. They were known by various names such as **karshaka**, **krishivala**, **kinasa**, **kshetrjivi**, **halika**, **ardhasiri**, **ardhika**, **kutumbi** and **bhumikarshaka** among others. What is common to these expressions is that they seem to have nothing to do with control over land. However, they refer to different categories of tillers of the soil — dependent peasants, share-croppers, field labourers etc. — none of whom were in absolute, independent control over their holdings. The peasant was not the master of the fruits of his labour. Substantial parts of it were placed at the disposal of the landlords. In addition, he had to render forced labour for production as well as the construction of forts, temples and grandiose structures for the beneficiaries. Interestingly, the number of forts and their importance grew noticeably in the second half of the first millennium A.D. Forts and large structures created the necessary atmosphere of awe and respect for the military strength of the lords, and thus ensured the servility of the peasants.

The period from the fourth to the seventh century witnessed the spread of the practice of forced labour **Vishti**. In the Konkan, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Malwa, cultivators along with artisans were employed for forced labour. The religious beneficiaries in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and parts of Karnataka came to enjoy the right to forced labour. In the sixth-seventh centuries, village headmen and petty officials came to exact forced labour for their personal gains. However, the earliest definite evidence for the employment of forced labour in agriculture is provided by the **Bhagavata Purana**, which is placed around the eighth century. By this time forced labour had become an all India

phenomenon. In the pronounced agrarian economy of the post-Gupta period characterised by localism, the extent and importance of forced labour naturally grew.

37.10 PROLIFERATION OF CASTES

Some features of the caste system during this period have already been mentioned. It was pointed out that one important development which took place during this period was that the number of castes or **jatis** increased substantially. This development affected even the brahmanas, the kshatriyas (and later the Rajputs), the **sudras** and the untouchables as well. The existing **varnas** were split into many castes and many tribes which became transformed into castes were included in them. Differences within the **varnas** intensified as brahmanical society expanded. Hierarchy emerged within each **varna** because of the acculturation and incorporation of various groups of people and communities at varying levels of cultural growth. Unequal access to economic and political power also helped the crystallization of caste distinctions during this period. While a number of castes came to be incorporated within each **varna**, there are also examples of earlier cohesive communities breaking up into many **varnas**, jatis/castes. The Abhira tribe provides a good example as it fragmented into Abhira brahmanas, Abhira kshatriyas and Abhira sudras.

37.10.1 The Brahmanas

The number of castes which emerged among the brahmanas was considerable. Brahmanas who "commercialised" their priestly services, those who came in contact with the aboriginals or those who could not entirely avoid physical labour stood degraded in the eyes of the **srotriya agrahara** brahmanas, who did not engage in manual labour. The migration of brahmanas to various regions for the enjoyment of landgrants also accelerated the process of caste and sub-caste formation within the **varna**. The immigrant brahmanas retained their identity on considerations of place of origin, the type of ritual they practised, the branch of Vedic learning they followed and so on. Their family identities provided another basis for differentiation. Many tribes when transformed into castes continued to have their tribal priests and their recognition as degraded brahmanas further swelled the ranks of the brahmanas. Once the idea of **varna** was accepted there was no great problem in the recognition and acceptance of the local priests as brahmanas. Brahmanas who stood close to political power and held high state offices were a different section. Their eminent position held by such brahmanas led to the formation of different ranks within the brahmana **varna**. The same process was true also of the kayasthas.

37.10.2 The Kshatriyas

Among the kshatriyas, proliferation of caste was caused by the emergence of new ruling houses from among the local tribes and the incorporation of foreign ethnic groups, wielding political power, into the mainstream of society. Among the foreign ethnic groups, the Bactrian Greeks, Sakas, Parthians, Hunas etc. were accommodated in the **varna** system as second class kshatriyas. The norm that the kshatriyas alone could rule forced new ruling houses to seek kshatriyahood through brahmanical support so as to win popular acceptance and legitimacy for their rule. The kshatriya castes multiplied from the fifth-sixth centuries when many tribal chiefs were transformed into "Hinduised" rajas through the approval of the brahmanas whom they patronized and the performance of Vedic sacrifices. Many ruling dynasties in the post-Gupta period emerged from humble origins and subsequently graduated to kshatriya status. The Pallavas and Chalukyas of peninsular India, Palas of Bengal and Bihar and many sub-regional dynasties in Orissa had tribal origins. In the subsequent centuries most Rajputs emerged from a tribal and/or pastoral base. The heterogeneous origins of the ruling dynasties and their desire for social acceptance explains the proliferation of castes in the kshatriya community.

37.10.3 The Sudras

Endogamous groups coming from various communities and regions vastly expanded the base of the sudra **varna**. Petty peasant castes, rich peasants, share-croppers and artisanal castes, with unequal access to economic power were included in the sudra **varna** in Gupta and post-Gupta times. Thus, sudra **varna** included widely disparate groups and came to comprise the largest number of castes. Numerous mixed castes, both "pure" and "impure", appeared in the

regular movement of brahmanas acculturated and peasantised tribal communities in remote regions and thus helped the spread of brahmanic culture. Tribes became castes as a consequence of their gradual transformation as peasants and these peasant groups were incorporated into the brahmanic society as sudras. This considerably added to the number and variety of sudra castes. However, as noted above, the chiefs and other leading families among tribes in such cases were assimilated in the higher castes of kshatriyas or similar castes like Rajputs and brahmanas.

The transformation of guilds into castes and the emergence of various categories of untouchables added to the ever increasing number of castes. During the ninth-tenth centuries and later, the process of caste and sub-caste formation accelerated immensely. A modern work mentions that today there are about five thousand castes in India, with around three hundred castes, on an average, in each linguistic state. The beginnings of the formation of many of these regional castes would certainly go back to the post-Gupta times.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the changes in the **Vaishya** community with reference to their economic decline. Your answers should not exceed 10 lines.

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- 2) Discuss the position of women during this period. Answer in 10 lines.

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- 3) The proliferation of castes was an important development in the Gupta and post-Gupta period. Explain in 15 lines.

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37.11 LET US SUM UP

The post-Gupta period was characterised by important social changes. The structure and character of **varna** hierarchy as they are known from **Dharmasastra** literature, were radically transformed. In northern India the **vaisyas** became hardly distinguishable from the **sudras** in eastern India, the Deccan and the south there were mainly the **brahmanas** and the **sudras**. The **varna** hierarchy remained only as a model scheme for the society and the occupational castes came to constitute the functioning social reality. However, in the hierarchy of numerous castes, the model remained relevant because it determined the “purity” and the “impurity” of the castes. New castes like the **kayasthas** emerged owing to various reasons like operation of partition laws, fragmentation of land and land transfers. There was relative rise in the position of the **sudras** as cultivators and the **vaisyas** suffered a decline in status. The landless untouchables crystallised and grew numerically. The proliferation of castes in general was the most striking development of the period. Society was increasingly getting hierarchically graded into statuses and many castes occupied only very low positions. Brahmanical society was polarised between comparatively few upper castes and numerous lower castes. The distinction was no more between the **dvija** (twice born upper three **varnas**) and the **sudra**. From now onwards it was said to be between the ritually pure and impure castes. Amidst all these developments the peasantry was being progressively subjected and thoroughly exploited by the landed beneficiaries, big and small alike. The economic changes (discussed in the earlier unit) provided the background to these social changes.

37.12 KEY WORDS

Acculturation	:	Adapt to a new culture. Here we mean brahmanic culture.
Autochthonous	:	Indigenous, native, aboriginal.
Commensality	:	Eating and interacting together as a group for mutual benefit.
Caste-peasant base	:	Referring to early settled agricultural society whose members were socially classified along caste lines.
Endogamy	:	The practice of marrying within one's own group.
Exogamy	:	Marriage outside one's own group.
Patriarchal	:	Families governed by paternal rights.

37.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answers should include the major economic changes of the period, the emergence of new social groups, proliferation of new castes, contradiction between the ritual and actual status of groups. See Secs. 37.1 and 37.2.
- 2) i) ✓ ii) × iii) ✓
- 3) See Sub-sec. 37.2.1.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answers should include the expansion of the agrarian base, decline in trade and urban occupations. See Sec. 37.6.
- 2) See Sec. 37.8.
- 3) Refer Sub-secs. 37.10.1, 37.10.2 and 37.10.3.

UNIT 38 STRUCTURE OF POLITY

Structure

- 38.0 Objectives
 - 38.1 Introduction
 - 38.2 The King
 - 38.3 Bureaucracy
 - 38.4 The Army
 - 38.5 Administrative Divisions
 - 38.6 The Samanta
 - 38.7 Taxation
 - 38.8 Judicial System
 - 38.9 Let Us Sum Up
 - 38.10 Key Words
 - 38.11 Answers To Check Your Progress Exercises
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38.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to know about:

- the nature of the polity or political organization during the period 300 A.D. to 700 A.D.,
 - the differences between the Mauryan polity and the polity during this period, and
 - the reasons why the political organization of this period is described as feudal in nature by many historians.
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38.1 INTRODUCTION

The period under study was dominated by the reigns of the Guptas and Pushyabhutis in the north, of the Vakatakas, Kadambas and Chalukyas of Badami in the Deccan and of the Pallavas in southern Andhra and Tamil Nadu. There were of course a number of small kingdoms and chieftaincies in many parts of the country. The major sources for the study of the polity of this period are inscriptions, **dharmaśāstra** literature, **Harshacharita** of Bana and the accounts of Chinese travellers like Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, etc. Broadly speaking the polity of this period was marked by hereditary monarchies ruling over small territories with one or two of them assuming wider sovereign status now and then. For example, the Guptas (from 300 A.D. to 500 A.D.) and Harsha (in the first half of the 7th century A.D.) had fairly wide areas under their control. Their political history has already been discussed in Block 8. In this Unit we shall discuss the main features of the political organization in the period between 300 A.D. and 700 A.D. We shall also try to show how these features mark a change from the political organization of the earlier periods and thus indicate that important changes were taking place also in the political organization of the country during this period.

38.2 THE KING

Most of the country was ruled by kings. Only in a few fringe areas there lingered on the **gana** (tribal republic) form of government. After the military expeditions of Samudragupta in north India early in the fourth century A.D. most of these tribal republics almost disappeared from the political scene. Thus the Madra and Yaudheya in the Panjab, the Abhira in central India, etc. are not heard of again. Some of the tribal chieftaincies also slowly became monarchies. The King took pompous titles like **paramamahesvara**, **rajadhiraja**, **paramabhattaraka**, etc. which indicate their superiority over many other smaller rulers. During this period the divine right theory also came into vogue. The King in keeping with this theory held such titles as **prithvivallabha** i.e. 'the beloved of the Earth goddess'. He is called the fifth **lokapala** as the other existing four **lokapalas** or guardians of the four cardinal directions were namely Kubera, Varuna, Indra and Yama. Though the

concept of the divinity of the King became dominant, it was combined with the notion of the King as guardian and protector.

Kingship was hereditary. Though succession to the throne was generally decided by law of primogeniture, that is, the eldest son succeeding his father, there were many exceptions to this rule. Sometimes kings were even elected by nobles and councillors. As head of the government, the King was overseer of all administrative activities of his realm. He was the supreme judge, and he usually led his army to the battlefields.

There are occasional references to queens acting as rulers, as in the cases of Prabhavati, the Vakataka queen who came from the ruling family of the Guptas, and of Didda, the queen, of a later period, of Kashmir. Generally however the queens remained in the background.

38.3 BUREAUCRACY

As compared to the Mauryan period, there is no clear evidence for the existence of a central **mantriparishad** or council of ministers to advise the King. There were, however, many high officials who were at times called **mantrin**. The other designations for higher officials were **sandhivigrahika**, who was minister for foreign affairs, war and peace; **mahabaladhikrita** and **mahadandanayaka**, both of which denoted superior posts in the army. Sometimes the same person was holding more than one such post; for example, Harishena who composed the famous Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta is said to have been a **sandhivigrahika** as well as a **mahadandanayaka**.

Besides these, there was in the Gupta government a class of officials known as **kumaramatyas**. It seems that most of the high officials were selected from this class or cadre and so the **kumaramatyas** are mentioned in various capacities like **sandhivigrahika**, **mahabaladhikrita**, etc. Some of them were under the direct control of the King where as some seem to have served the princes and provincial governors. The officer called **Uparika** was in charge of a **bhukti**, an administrative division. **Ayuktaka** was a member of the bureaucracy who, like **Vishayapati**, functioned at a level higher than villages, and he was an important intermediate administrative link between the **bhukti** and the village.

The officials seem to have been paid in cash in the beginning of our period and later they were just assigned revenues of some designated territories and they were therefore called **bhogika** or **bhogapati**. This is known from **Harshacharita** which refers to the complaints made to Harsha by villagers against such officials. The posts also became hereditary, thereby weakening the King's authority in course of time.

38.4 THE ARMY

Both for maintaining internal peace and for defending against external aggression a standing army became a regular feature during this period. It was noted above that there were a number of high military officials and they were obviously in charge of this army. Cavalry was an important element of this army. Some maritime states like the Pallavas in the south also had navy. Chariots do not figure prominently during this time. The royal army was supplemented by the militia of feudatory chiefs (**samanta**).

38.5 ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS

The country was organised into many divisions for administrative purposes. The highest unit among these territorial divisions was called **bhukti** which was under the charge of a high official called **uparika**. Sometimes princes were also in charge of some **bhukti**. **Vishaya** was the next administrative division below which was the lowest unit, i.e., the village. In certain areas **vishaya** was also known as **rashtra**. In eastern India the **vishayas** were also divided into **vithis** over and above the village. At the level of **vishaya** the officials (or locally powerful people) called **Vishayapatis** played a leading role in the administration. In each village a headman and the village elders managed the local affairs. In urban settlements or towns there were a number of craft and merchant guilds to look after their administration.

38.6 THE SAMANTA

Semi-independent local chiefs called **samanta** were an important feature of the polity of this time. We have already read that Samudragupta conquered and subjugated a number of territories. Some of the rulers of these territories which were on the fringes of the Gupta empire were made subordinate allies of the King. They became feudatories, so to say, of the Gupta King paying periodical tribute to the latter. Some of them also presented him their daughters in marriage. They were obliged to pay homage to the King by personally attending his court. The King in turn recognised their right to continue to rule over their own territories and for this he also gave them charters. These subordinate rulers were also obliged to send their men to fight in the King's army during times of war. Subject to the above obligations the feudatories or **samantas** were left to look after the administration of their territories, which was actually done by King's officials in the central parts of the Gupta empire.

Another factor which really introduced features of a decentralized polity was the granting of land to priests and officials for their maintenance. Generally the King not only gave the land but also parted with some of his administrative rights like taxing the people, punishing the criminals, etc. The granted territories were also given immunity from the entry of the King's army. Naturally the grantees of such lands became almost independent of the King and became **samantas** themselves. Consequent to this, in the 7th century A.D. and after we find officials giving themselves pompous titles like **mahasamanta** and 'one who obtained the privilege of five great sounds (**panchamahasabda**)'. Through the use of these titles, the **samantas** and **mahasamantas** proclaimed their autonomy. The presence of all these features in polity has led historians to suggest that from the Gupta period onward the political organization which developed in India represented a feudal-type of political organization.

38.7 TAXATION

The government got most of its revenue through taxation. Land taxes called **baga**, **bhoga**, etc. were the main items and the land taxes actually increased through the centuries. As trade and commerce seem to have declined during this period commercial taxes are not found prominently. The local people were also obliged to provide for the stay and food of villages. It may be noted here that as far as the lands granted to officials and priests are concerned, the government lost much of its revenue from those lands.

38.8 JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Judicial system was more developed now compared to earlier times. Many law codes and treatises were compiled during this period and the **dharmasastras** elaborately dealt with legal matters.

There were different courts like **Karana**, **adhikarana**, **dharmasana**, etc. Criminal and civil cases were clearly differentiated from each other. Laws regarding property and inheritance were elaborate. Of course justice was based on the **varna** classification in society. For the same kind of crime, culprits belonging to a higher **varna** or caste got less punishment than those belonging to a lower **varna**. **Dharmasastras** also insisted that local usages and practices of different guilds and castes should be given due weight while dispensing justice.

Check Your Progress

- 1) Discuss the main differences between the Mauryan polity and the polity during 300 A.D. – 700 A.D.

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2) Mark which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×).

- a) The Samantas maintained their own armies.
- b) **Bhukti** was the lowest administrative division.
- c) The King adopted pompous titles during this period.
- d) Pallavas did not have a naval force.
- e) Justice was based on **Varna** divisions.

3) Write in about five lines the role of **samantas** in the polity.

38.9 LET US SUM UP

From the above sections a fair idea may be obtained regarding the polity of the period from 300 A.D. to 700 A.D. However, in India during this period a uniform pattern may not be found in all the kingdoms. But there were a number of common features in all of them. Monarchy had become a regular feature throughout the length and breadth of the subcontinent. A regular division of each state's territory for administrative purpose, a hierarchy of officials forming the bureaucracy, a standing army and a sort of revenue or taxation system may be found in all the kingdoms, particularly in central parts of each sovereign state. But when compared to the Mauryan polity the King's government during this period did not possess effective powers and control throughout its territory.

In the outlying areas the feudatory chiefs or **samantas** had their administrative jurisdiction and their recognition of the King's authority was only nominal. The Mauryan government had a large number of higher officials to control each and every social and economic activity in the major part of the empire. This was not so in the case of the Gupta empire or other contemporary polities, where many things were outside the state control. For example, while craft and merchant guilds were kept under strict government vigilance in the Mauryan state, they were more or less autonomous in the Gupta age. Even the laws pertaining to each guild were given due recognition in the latter case. Such fragmentation of Kingly powers during this period is to be attributed to certain major changes emerging in the socio-economic organization. These changes became prominent by the 7th century A.D. and after giving birth to what is described as 'Indian Feudalism' by Prof. R.S. Sharma. As far as the period under study is concerned the new elements were just emerging and they took more definite shape in later centuries.

38.10 KEY WORDS

Adhikarana	: A court of justice.
Bhaga	: Land tax
Bhukti	: Highest administrative division
Divine right theory	: The theory that the right (of kingship) was obtained from the god.
Feudalism	: A Socio-economic and political system where relationship between a superior (lord) and his subordinate (vassal) is based on landgrant or assignment (fief) and where the lord is obliged

to protect his vassal and the vassal is obliged to render military service to his lord in times of need.

Gana	: a tribal republic which is governed by chiefs, a chief of ruling clans and not by a king.
Kumaramatya	: A general cadre of higher officials.
Mantri	: Minister
Samanta	: A feudatory chief
Sandhivigrahika	: Minister for foreign affairs, peace and war.

38.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

- 1) Read Secs. 38.2 and 38.9 and base your answer on them.
- 2) a) ✓ b) × c) ✓ d) × e) ✓
- 3) See Sec. 38.6

UNIT 39 DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGION

Structure

- 39.0 Objectives
- 39.1 Introduction
- 39.2 Emergence of Bhakti in Brahmanism
 - 39.2.1 Syncretism of Deities
 - 39.2.2 Adaptation of Tribal Rituals
 - 39.2.3 Royal Support to Temples and Theism.
- 39.3 Spread of Bhakti to South India
- 39.4 Bhakti Movement in South India
- 39.5 Protest and Reform in the Bhakti Movement of the South and later Transformation of the Bhakti Movement
- 39.6 Emergence of Tantrism
 - 39.6.1 Some Main Features of Tantrism
 - 39.6.2 Tantrism and the Heterodox Religions
- 39.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 39.8 Key Words
- 39.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

39.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this Unit is to briefly discuss the major features of Religious developments in the early medieval period with focus on the shape which **Bhakti** ideology and Tantrism took. After going through this Unit you should be able to :

- know about the origins of **Bhakti** in Brahmanical religious order,
- know the character and social context of the characteristic of later Brahmanism,
- know how the character and social context of **Bhakti** changed in the early medieval period,
- realise how royal support to **Bhakti** cults gave them wealthy institutional bases,
- know about the origin and role of Tantrism and its character in the early medieval period, and
- know how Tantrism penetrated into Buddhism and Jainism.

39.1 INTRODUCTION

You are by now familiar with certain broad stages of the religious history of early India. While archaeological material suggests that certain elements of Indian religions were present in the archaeological cultures dating prior to the **Vedas**, the hymns of the **Rig Veda** give us for the first time, an idea of how prayers were offered to deities to please them. However, the simple prayers of the **Rig Veda** gave place gradually to complex rituals dominated by Brahmanas and one can notice the growth of a close relationship between the Brahmanas and the rulers and warriors on this situation. Not only the wandering ascetics who moved away from the established society but also the Buddhist and the Jainas did not accept the dominance of the Brahmanas and the rigid social and moral order which the Brahmanas advocated. There thus grew the heterodox movements which received support not only from rulers and rich merchants but also from other sections of people. In the pre-Gupta period Buddhism reached the height of its glory, spread to countries outside India and Buddhist centres were constructed on a large scale. Meanwhile certain changes were taking place within Brahmanism as well as within heterodox sects. From the religious point of view the most important change was that the devotee was considered as being bound to the supreme god head by devotion (**bhakti**) and the god head was worshipped in the form of images. Vaishnavism and Saivism as parts of Brahmanical religion attracted many devotees; image worship became widespread among the Buddhists who worshipped not only the Buddha or

Bodhisatva but also a host of other deities, the Jains too worshipped the images of Tirthankaras, various minor deities, stone **ayagapatas** and other objects.

The Brahmanas used image worship to build up pantheons of deities by assimilating gods and goddesses from diverse sources. This is how many female deities (**sakti**) became prominent in Brahmanical religions from the Gupta period onward. In fact, there was no homogeneity in Brahmanical religions and religious practices and beliefs varied widely. Different sects of Saivism, such as the Pasupatas, the Kaula-Kapalikas and the Kalamukhas were opposed to the dominance of the Brahmanas. They had their own religious orders centred around **mathas** or monasteries and they received support from many royal families. At the same time, Brahmanas who cultivated the **Vedas** and continued to perform Vedic sacrifices received royal support and **agrahara** settlements of the Brahmanas came to be a major link in the spread of Brahmanical ideas and practices throughout the country. The temple also became an institution which drew people together and served effectively in the spread of ideas.

Although in the complex religious situation of early medieval India the Brahmanas were gaining ascendancy, one should keep in mind also the following terms:

- 1) The orthodox Brahmanical order continued to be challenged particularly by movements within Saivism, by poet saints and by those who practised tantric form of worship.
- 2) Most religions irrespective of whether it was Brahmanism, Buddhism or Saivism, developed institutional bases in the form of temples and monasteries.
- 3) Ruling powers and elite sections of society supported institutions and Brahmanas, monks, **acharyas** or religious heads and others by grants of land, wealth and by other means. By these acts of patronage, the ruling powers and elite sections of society strengthened their own social base.

These are the various aspects which have been taken up in this Unit.

39.2 EMERGENCE OF BHAKTI IN BRAHMANISM

Brahmanism had to accept the growing importance of new gods like Siva and Vishnu side by side with Vedic gods like Indra and Varuna. It also assimilated many other popular deities like Vasudeva, Skanda and so on. All these led to the growth of the **Bhakti** cult.

Around the fourth century B.C. the cult of Vasudeva was becoming popular. This is suggested by reference to it by classical authors like Megasthenes who came to the court of Chandragupta Maurya.

The worshippers of Vasudeva submitted to **Bhakti** as the proper religious approach and called themselves Bhagavatas. Several epigraphs of the early Christian era bear testimony to the prevalence of the Vasudeva cult in central India and the Deccan.

Simultaneously with the cult of Vasudeva arose the sect of Pasupatas, devotees of Pasupati or Siva, a fertility deity. This cult was kept alive in non-brahmanic circles from the days of the Harappan culture.

The popularity of these new gods increased during the Sunga and Kushana periods. Patanjali, who lived in the Sunga period, in his **Mahabhashya** refers to the exhibition and sale of the images of Siva, Skanda and Vishakha. These gods appear on the coins of the Kushana kings, especially Huvishka. An important characteristic of later Brahmanism was its capacity to adopt new trends. This became necessary to meet the challenge of the 'heretical sects' which were opposed to Brahmanism. Besides adopting new gods, Brahmanism gradually shifted its emphasis from Vedic ritual to **Bhakti**, which implied the cultivation and development of a personal relationship between God and the devotee. Thus a monotheistic concept of God, with either Siva or Vishnu as his manifestation and **Bhakti** (loyalty and devotion) to him was gaining strength. Soon **Bhakti** became the dynamic force of later Brahmanism also called Hinduism.

39.2.1 Syncretism of Deities

An important characteristic of the new Brahmanism was its genius to syncretise many local deities and to evolve a monotheistic great God. Syncretism in this context will mean that

deities worshipped at different places and by different people were recognised as identical and were worshipped as manifestation of the same supreme deity. Thus Vasudeva was identified with Vishnu, a minor Vedic god and Narayana, a god of obscure origin mentioned in the Brahmana literature. Then Vishnu was closely connected with the name of Krishna, who represented the fusion between martial hero and a flute-playing pastoral deity. Vishnu could assimilate many other cults — the cult of the 'divine boar' which prevailed among some of the tribes of Malwa, the cult of Parasurama, a Brahmana hero; and Rama, the great hero of the **Ramayana**. Then Vishnu rose to the status of the Universal God in the **Bhagavad Gita**.

Similarly, Siva came to be syncretised with the Vedic Rudra and Bhairava, a tribal god and was worshipped in the form of the phallic emblem or **linga**. With Siva were later associated certain other deities such as Skanda and the elephant-headed Ganesa.

These theistic cults stressed the merit of worship rather than the performance of Vedic sacrifice.

39.2.2 Adaptation of Tribal Rituals

Yet another important feature of later Brahmanism was its adaptation of the tribal rituals keeping the Vedic **Yajna** rites supreme only in theory. In course of time the merit derived out of these new rituals were equated with the merit of the Vedic **Yajna**. Further, the sacred spots of the tribals were included as new places of pilgrimage (**tirtha**) with suitable myths to make them respectable. The **Ithihasas** and **Puranas** are full of such material or stories which inspire **bhakti** (devotion) to a personal god.

39.2.3 Royal Support to Temples and Theism

The **Puranas** highlighted the merits acquired by visiting great cultcentres like Mathura and Varanasi which were major places of pilgrimage. This gave a stimulus to the institution of the temple. In fact, the **Puranas** and other texts of the period list numerous places of pilgrimage (**tirthas**) which drew devotees in large numbers because visiting **tirthas** would ensure merit. The temple which housed the deity, became a place of worship and thus drew devotees away from home to an institution which became a public centre. The Gupta age marked the beginning of temple construction. It laid the foundation of the typical styles of Indian temple architecture. Among the few Gupta temples which survive, the Dasavatara temple of Devagarh, the Vishnu temple at Tigawa, and the Siva temple at Bhumara are known for their beauty. The epic and Puranic stories relating to Rama and Krishna were represented in the temple sculptures. Excellent specimens of them are still found in the Devagarh temple. The Gupta emperors patronised both Saivism and Vaishnavism. However, the personal religion of most of the Gupta rulers was Vaishnavism which led to the creation of a number of important Vaishnava centres and Vaishnava sculptures in the Gupta period. The idea of the **awataras** or incarnations of Vishnu in which Vishnu is born on earth as a boar, a fish, or a human being for rescuing earth from a crisis, also seems to have been systematised in the Gupta period.

In the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. Saivism seems to have replaced Vaishnavism as recipient of royal patronage in northern India. Saivism counted among its followers supreme rulers, foreign as well as indigenous, such as Mihirakula, Yashodharman, Sasanka and Harsha. Pasupata or Saiva **acharyas** are frequently mentioned in contemporary records which include inscriptions, and many literary works like those of Varahamihira, Bana and Hiuen Tsang.

39.3 SPREAD OF BHAKTI TO THE SOUTH

All the major north Indian religions — Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism — travelled southwards. The Brahmanas brought with them the Vedic **Yajna** cult and the two theistic cults, Vaishnavism and Saivism. The kings were in favour of the Vedic rituals as they conferred ritual status on them. The theistic cults struck root among the people. However, eventually the devotional theistic cults were to prove stronger than any other religious force in the south, and this was recognized even by royal patrons who extended support to Vaishnavism, Saivism and their sects.

Among the early Chalukya kings of Vatapi some professed Bhagavatism and others, the Pasupata cult. The famous bas-reliefs of Badami testify to the popularity of the theistic cults in the Deccan in the sixth-seventh centuries A.D. Similarly, the Pallavas of Kanchi patronised the two theistic cults as shown by the monolithic **rathas** (chariots) at Mahabalipuram and many bas-reliefs on them.

Bhakti, centring around the worship of specific deities, began to spread fast in the south through the brahmana settlements and temple centres where the exposition of the **epics** and the **Puranas** was institutionalized by means of munificent landgrants. Thus **Bhakti** was popularised among the common people. It is to be noted that the way in which the Brahmanas transformed the earlier religious forms into temple-centred theistic culture in the north was repeated in the south also.

39.4 BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN SOUTH INDIA

The final form of theistic **Bhakti** was largely the result of the influence of the Tamil devotionalism. This devotionalism was a product of the fusion between ecstatic local tribal cults (e.g. **Velan Veriyadal**) and northern theistic schools. This cross fertilization started at Tiruppati and Kalahasti, which then constituted the northern door of the Tamil country. Then it developed around Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital and soon reached the region of Madurai, the Pandyan capital. The **Tiru Murugu Arruppada**i, a famous devotional work on Muruga, the local tribal god who was syncretised with Skanda in this work, is the earliest example of this cross fertilization.

Soon this Tamil devotionalism developed into a great movement when it was adapted to the two theistic cults, Saivism and Vaishnavism. Then Tamil **Bhakti** movement was characterized not only by intense ecstatic piety for the deity, but also an aggressive militancy against the heterodox cults which were growing in popularity among the people with royal support.

This movement was spearheaded in the sixth century A.D. by gifted poet-saints who traversed the country many times with great missionary zeal. All their way they sang their hymns, danced and debated with the heterodox cults. Among these hymnal poet-saints the Saiva saints are called Nayanmar and the Vaishnava saints as Alvars.

This great wave of religious enthusiasm attained its peak in the early seventh century and its triumph was largely achieved in the two centuries that followed. The hymns of the saints of this period are marked by an outspoken hatred against the Buddhists and the Jains. As a result, public debates, competition in the performance of miracles and tests of the truth of their doctrines by means of ordeal became the order of the day.

There were other reasons for the success and popularity of these hymnal saints. Unlike the Brahmanas who propagated Hinduism through esoteric theories and the use of Sanskrit, the hymnal saints sang in easily understood forms using only the popular language, Tamil. Their **Bhakti** was not a reverence for a transcendent deity, but ecstatic love for an imminent one. Being unable to stand before the force of this **Bhakti** wave which also attracted royal support, Jainism and Buddhism had to retreat from the South.

39.5 PROTEST AND REFORM IN THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT OF THE SOUTH AND LATER TRANSFORMATION OF THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT

Whereas the Brahmanas were obsessed with caste regulations, the Bhakti movement not only ignored caste but also included men and women of all castes. Among the Nayanmar Karaikkal, Ammai was a woman and Nandanar was a member of the depressed class. Among the Alvars, Andal was a woman and Tiruppan was a hymnist from a "low caste". Thus the whole movement carried elements of protest and reform. However, it soon became part of the establishment, lost its early character and got engulfed by brahmanical orthodoxy.

The **Bhakti** movement ran parallel to the growth and consolidation of early medieval monarchies, first under the Pallavas and then under the cholas, Pandyas and the Cheras. Many rock temples were cut and structural temples were built for Siva and Vishnu throughout the Tamil land by almost all the reigning monarchs.

These temples were endowed with vast landed property, often tax-free. Extensive areas of land were donated to the Brahmanas as is evident from the thousands of donative inscriptions on the walls of the south Indian temples. A prince-priest axis soon emerged. The monarchs fervently welcomed the rich temple-centered **bhakti** (or unflinching loyalty) as it suited the monarchical ideology. The Brahmanas welcomed this as it enabled Brahmanism, with its institutional base in the temple-centred agrarian settlements, to emerge as the most dynamic force in south India.

Everywhere the local temple was the nucleus of religious life and a new social formation. In these temples the two arms of the brahmanical religion — the ritualistic Vedic cult and the theistic devotional cult — could meet. The temple-centred **Bhakti** enabled the all-embracing caste system to attract all the original tribes of south India within its fold and place them in the hierarchical caste order. This order fixed the ritual and social status of the tribes with the Brahmana as the fixed point of reference. The ideology of **Bhakti** could bring together kings, priests and the common people within a network of understandable social relations.

With the increasing patronage of kings and landed magnates, the **Bhakti** movement soon became part of the establishment. Thus all trances of dissent, protest and reform were obliterated in the tenth century A.D. The Alvars and the Nayanmars do not appear any more. Their place was taken by Vaishnava acharyas, all of whom were Brahmanas or the Saivite santanacharyas who all came from the rich landed Vellala caste.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss in about five lines the reasons for royal support to temples.

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- 2) In what ways did the Bhakti Movement in the South differ from Brahmanism. Answer in about 10 lines.

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39.6 EMERGENCE OF TANTRISM

The religious practices which originated in the most primitive fertility rites of the non-Aryan tribal circles later came to be known as Tantrism. It not only infiltrated into the other 'civilized' cults (Jainism, Buddhism, Saivism, Vaishnavism etc.) but also emerged as a challenge and reaction to these cults as all of them had developed vested interests and had become parts of the establishment by the early medieval period. The established forms of religion modified tantrism and attempted to sublimate it through mystical interpretations and symbols. So, to the modern educated people, the core of Tantrism means essentially orgiastic rites involving the use of five **makaras** : **matsya** (fish) , **mamsa** (meat), **madya** (liquor), **maithuna** (sex) and **mudra** (physical gestures).

39.6.1 Some Main Features of Tantrism

There always existed a marginal population to whom sorcery, fertility rites and secret tribal cults seemed essential. People who felt dissatisfied with official 'civilized' religion continued to learn and adapt these secret rites through the ages.

In the Tantric practices of the early medieval period we can see three important features, all of them interconnected. They are: a higher status given to women, sexual rituals, and the presence of many female deities.

The causes for all these have to be traced to the tribal fertility rites. Women clearly enjoyed a higher status in all the tribal belts. Since in the Sanskrit texts they were bracketed with the sudras, it became necessary for them to raise their traditional ritual status by means of Tantric initiations.

Similarly, among the primitive people in India and outside, sexual rites formed an important part of their religious rites. It was believed by the tribals that such rites promoted the fertility of the earth.

The reason for the importance of female deities in Tantrism is that in all the tribal belts the cult of the mother goddesses was widely prevalent. These aboriginal goddesses entered into Brahmanism as Shakti, Buddhism as Tara and Jainism as many Yakshinis. The Gaudavah, a Prakrit text of the early medieval period associates Kali and Parvati with such tribals as the Kols and the Sabaras. Shakti is known as Matangi (a goddess of Matanga tribes and Candali a goddess of the Candalas). At the end of the Gupta period many tribal goddesses were absorbed into the higher cults, together with many magical rites, religious sexuality and a new form of animal sacrifice. All these increased in importance throughout the early medieval period. Tantrism emerged as a religious factor in the sixth century A.D. and became a strong force by the ninth century.

Despite the fact that Tantrism lost much of its original character by the early medieval period and that it received patronage from kings, officials and higher classes who Sanskritised it, Tantrism continued to be a challenge to organized and officially patronized major religions like Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism.

The priests of Tantrism challenged the exclusive initiatory rites of the brahmanas. If brahmanas claimed superiority due to their Vedic rituals, the tribal priests claimed magical powers through their esoteric rituals and sexo-yogic practices. Thus Tantrism served an important social purpose by generally providing for the initiation of lower castes and women, who were held to be of inferior status by the brahmanical system.

The Tantric priests claimed mastery over a number of rituals, occult practices and herbal remedies not only to cure snake bites, insect bites and so on, but also to ward off the evil effects caused by ghosts and planets. Thus the early medieval Tantric priest acted as a priest, physician, astrologer and shaman.

39.6.2 Tantrism and the Heterodox Religions

It was noted that the most primitive fertility rites reappeared sublimated in form, as Tantrism and penetrated Buddhism, Jainism and the Brahmana theology.

Makkhali Gosala, a contemporary of the Buddha and Mahavira, not only went naked but is said to have drunk and practiced orgiastic sexual rites, which doubtless originated in the primitive cults.

Early Buddhism and Jainism tried their best to check the infiltration of these Tantric practices into their cults. In the earliest phase of their history Buddhism and Jainism launched a systematic campaign against the cult of image worship, rituals and sacrifices as destructive of all morals. They stressed on the purification of soul for the attainment of **nirvana** or salvation.

Mahayanism, a major development of Buddhism adopted image worship during the Kushana period. Mahayanism is said to have developed into Mantrayanism or Vajrayanism in the Andhra region by adopting Tantric practices. Many Tantric texts emerged since the third century A.D. from Andhra and Kalinga and spread to Vanga and Magadha where Nalanda developed as a centre of Tantric study in the reign of the Palas. **Sri Guhyasamaja Tantra** was written probably in the 3rd century A.D. The Vajrayana Tantric literature is so vast that only a nominal catalogue of its works found in Tibetan language comprises three high volumes.

Idol worship and rituals appeared in Jainism in the early centuries of the Christian era. Samantabhadra (third century A.D.) in his **Paumacariya** glorified temple worship and rituals. Jaina, **Puranas** and other literature emphasised that the devotees of Adinatha could get victory over enemies and ward off diseases and evil spirits.

In the early medieval age Tantrism infiltrated into Jainism on a significant scale as it did into other religions. As a result, Jainism developed a pantheon of Yakshas and Yakshis (the attendant demi-gods and goddesses of the Tirthankaras) together with a number of **mantras** (magical formulae) to propitiate them. Many Jaina Tantric texts, which incorporated elements of magic and miracle, glorified the cult of Yakshis like Padmavati Ambika, Siddhayika and Jvalamalini. These Yakshis were believed to bestow superhuman powers on their devotees. The Yapaniya sect of the Jainas was the foremost in propagating Tantric mode of worship in early medieval Karnataka.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the main features of Tantrism in about 10 lines.

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- 2) Discuss the relationship of Tantrism with other heterodox religions. Answer in 10 lines.

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39.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you have seen how Brahmanism had to accept the growing importance of new gods and assimilated many other popular deities. The **Bhakti** cult emerged out of the various religious cults and became very strong in South India. It ignored caste regulations and women had a higher status in **Bhakti** movement when compared to Brahmanism. The numbers of female deities also increased – particularly in Tantrism. The practices of Tantrism infiltrated into other religions.

39.8 KEY WORDS

Alvars	:	the Vaishnava bhakti saints of early medieval Tamil Country (6th–9th century). Their tradi-number was 12.
Bhagavata	:	a devotee of Vasudeva–Krishna.
Brahmanism	:	a Syncretising religion under the brahmin leadership. Always holding the supremacy of the Vedic rituals in theory, it adapted bhakti, many tribal gods and tribal rituals in practices.
Heterodox Cults	:	Jainism, Buddhism and Ajivikism which first challenged Vedic rituals and then all Brahmanism.
Muruga	:	a tribal god of the early Tamils, syncretised around 3rd–4th centuries A.D. by Brahmanism with Skanda–Kartikaya.
Nayanmar	:	the Saiva bhakti saints of early medieval Tamil country, sixty-three in number. A few of the them were great hymnal poets.
Nirvana	:	liberation of the soul as conceived by the heterodox cults.
Pasupatas	:	the devotees of Siva or Pasupati. Their cult originated in the North and developed special features.
Saivism	:	a general term to denote any cult which conceived Siva as the greatest God. Saivism has many local varieties.
Tantrism	:	a religion originating in the primitive fertility rites of the non-Aryan tribal circles. Later adapted and mystified by the civilized cults.
Vaishnavism	:	a general term to denote any cult with Vishnu as the greatest God. It has many local varieties.
Velan Veriyadal	:	a primitive orgiastic-ecstatic cult of the ancient Tamil tribals centring on Muruga.
Yajna	:	the complex rituals, including expensive animal sacrifices, of the later Vedic times.

39.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-sec. 39.2.3
- 2) See Sections 39.3 and 39.4

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-sec. 39.6.1
- 2) See Sub-sec. 39.6.2

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*

Romila Thapar, *History of India V.I.*